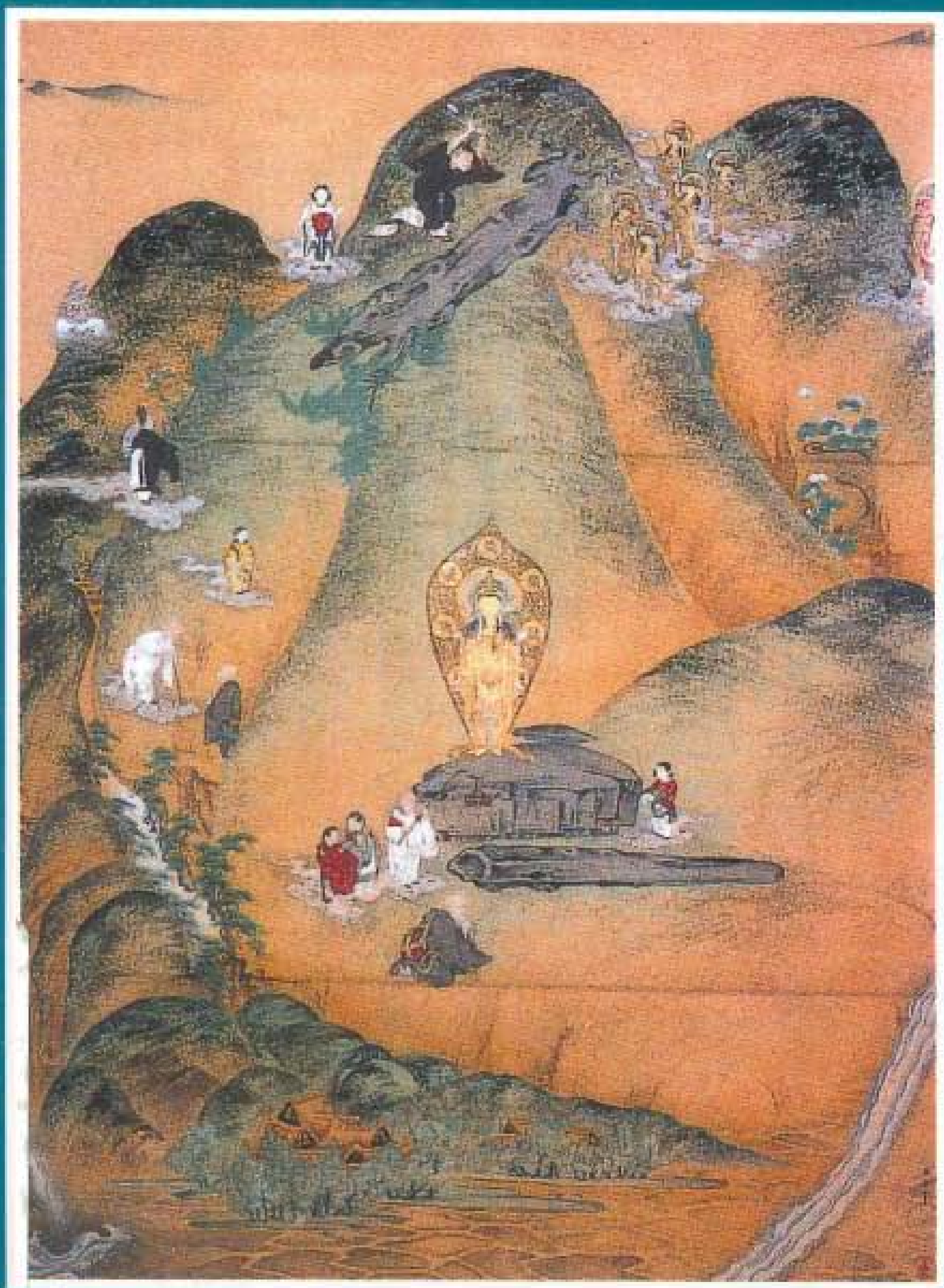
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VEGETAL BUDDHAS

Fabio Rambelli



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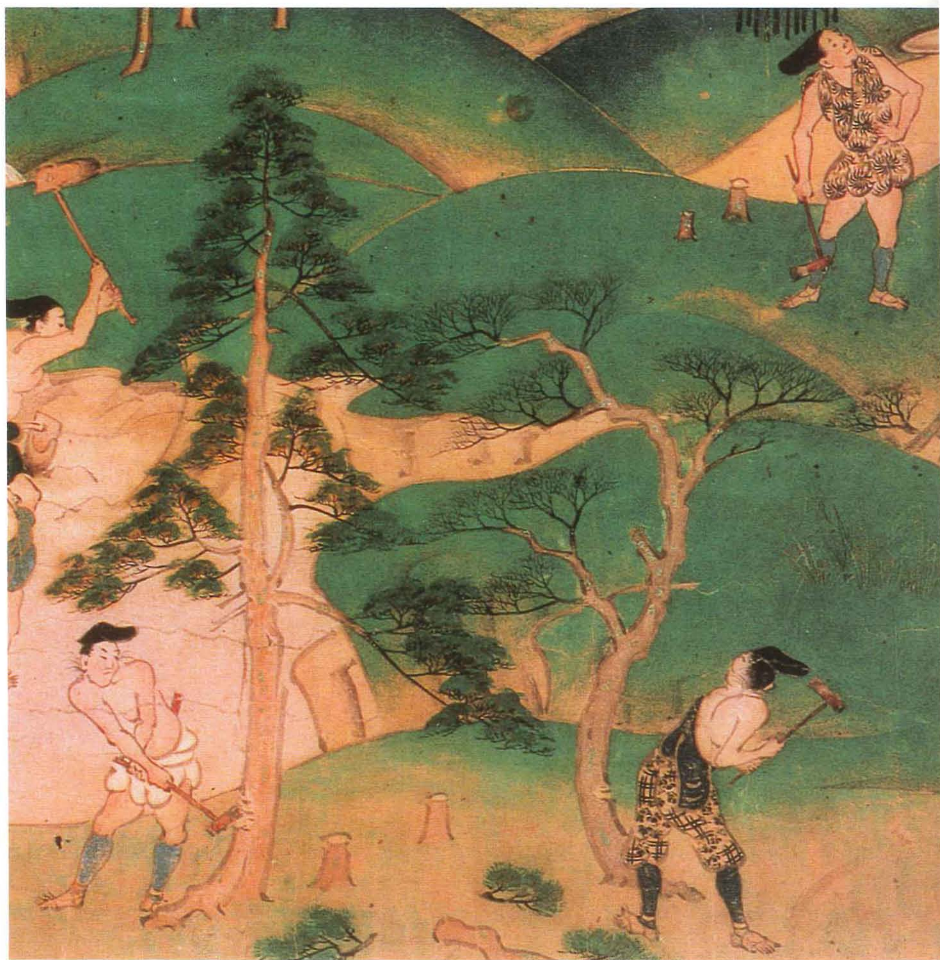


Fig. 1 - Tree cutting from the *Ishiyamadera engi emaki* 石山寺縁起絵巻. Kamakura Period, Ishiyamadera 石山寺, Shiga Prefecture.

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VEGETAL BUDDHAS

Ideological Effects of Japanese Buddhist Doctrines on the Salvation of Inanimate Beings

by *Fabio Rambelli*



Scuola Italiana di Studi sull'Asia Orientale

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INTRODUCTION

NONSENTIENTS, NATURE, AND MATERIAL OBJECTS

One of the most important questions taken up in East Asian Buddhist doctrines is that of the scope and range of Buddha-nature (Ch. *foxing* 佛性, Jp. *busshō*), namely, whether it permeates the totality of reality or not. This issue is often presented as the question of the possibility for plants and the components of the environment (including inanimate, material objects) to become buddhas.[1] Through this, Buddhism articulated a sophisticated philosophy of objects.

East Asian Buddhism has developed a series of concepts that refer to the realm of the nonsentients—material objects and entities devoid of a conscious mind—which constitute and furnish the material space where both sentient beings in the Six Destinations (*rokudō* 六道 or *rokushu* 六趣) and buddhas live and operate. In particular, *hijō* 非情 or *mujō* 無情 (nonsentients) and *kikai* 器界 (realm of objects) refer to the milieu of buddhas and sentient beings. They are therefore related to such concepts as *ujō* 有情 (sentient beings), *shujō* 衆生 (living beings), *shujōkai* 衆生界 (realm of sentient beings) and *bukkai* 佛界 (realm of the buddhas). On the other hand, *ehō* 依報, which literally means "karmic support," is the material environment (space and circumstances with the related set of objects) in which sentient beings find themselves as a consequence of karmic retribution. This notion is related to that of *shōbō* 正報, "karmic retribution proper," the particular body-mind complex that forms the subjectivity of a sentient being as a result of karma.

In Japan, terms referring to materiality and the environment are considered synonymons with more concrete expressions such as *sōmoku kokudo* 草木國土 (plants and the territory), *sōmoku kasen gareki* 草木河川瓦礫 (plants, rivers, bricks, and stones), or more

[1] Throughout the book, "Buddha" (capitalized) will be used as a proper noun to refer to a specific Buddha, whereas "buddha" or "buddhas" (lower case) will indicate a general condition as a result of certain soteriologic practices.

simply *sōmoku* 草木 (plants). This synonymity is important to recognize because in most medieval doctrinal tracts a term such as *sōmoku* did not refer literally to "plants" only but rather to the entire realm of the non-sentients. Most often this extended to inanimate objects of any kind, including man-made artifacts.[2] Therefore, as we will see in the course of this book, "nature" is not always an accurate rendition of the doctrinal contents of these concepts.

Japanese authors have usually studied the Buddhist philosophy of objects as a purely doctrinal matter isolated from larger social and ideological issues. Most of them consider it the manifestation in Buddhist terms of an ahistorically understood Shintō 神道 animism that is believed to permeate the Japanese cultural tradition. In some cases, this is related to a vague environmental concern supposedly generated by such animism. One of the goals of the present study is to formulate a critique of such interpretations.

I will address here the Buddhist discourse of the nonsentients from the perspective of an intellectual history open to the field of cultural studies, which I understand as a clearinghouse of tools and approaches useful in comprehending the workings of a culture. Particular emphasis will be placed on the contexts of the source material relating to the inanimate world and the processes of signification they generated. One of the problems with received scholarship on the relationships among Buddhism, plants, and objects is over-specialization and excessive compartmentalization, which prevents it from addressing the discourse from a multidisciplinary perspective. Most studies consist of philological and doctrinal discussions of elite texts almost completely isolated from their shifting contexts of production and interpretation. Other scholars address ideas and practices on a "folk" level, but largely ignore their doctrinal foundations. One notable exception is Taira Masayuki 平雅行, who has indicated that medieval prohibitions against cutting trees issued by religious institutions were in fact attempts to apply Buddhist ethical precepts to the fields of economy and power relations.[3] However, even Taira failed to connect such

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2 The role of plants as objects is particularly evident in the art form known as *ikebana* 生け花, in which vegetal elements are isolated from their contexts to form examples of abstract expressionism that point to the nature of the vegetal as object. It is also seen in premodern iron sculptures representing trees and branches, known as *tetsuju* 鐵樹 (iron trees).

3 Taira Masayuki, *Nihon chūsei no shakai to bukkyō* 日本中世の社会と仏教, 1992, pp. 247-249.

prohibitions to the Buddhist discourse on nonsentients and related treatments of materiality, as part of a larger cultural picture.

Ecological and environmental concerns are often mentioned in contemporary literature on plants becoming buddhas. In this monograph, Japanese Buddhist ecology is understood as a set of discursive practices related to the definition, interpretation, and uses of the environment (*kikai*, *ehō*) of sentient beings and the objects inhabiting it. Thus, whenever I refer to "ecology" I do so with this larger meaning in mind. This meaning is closely related to economy, politics, and ideology, and is not the result of a supposed "love for nature," as most authors suggest. I will show that Buddhist doctrines on plants constitute in fact a discourse on the material environment, its status and its functions. Such a discourse was articulated with respect to three orders of significance, which I define as ecosophia, ecognosis, and ecopietas. Ecosophia refers to standard Buddhist doctrines denying the nonsentients the possibility of becoming buddhas.[4] With ecognosis I indicate Tendai and Shingon initiatory doctrines on the absolute and unconditioned nature of the nonsentients. Finally, ecopietas has to do with popular, widespread beliefs and attitudes about the sacredness of the natural world and material objects in general.

The medieval Japanese discourse on the material environment addresses a number of social concerns, such as the status of the members of the initiatory lineages producing these doctrines, the ontology of social order, the control of the material world of the nonsentients, and the distribution of its wealth. As such, doctrines on the Buddha-nature of plants played an important ideological role in the creation of a vision of order and of power relations in society. We will see that this Buddhist discourse was not a mere doctrinal curiosity or a manifestation of an animistic love for nature. Rather, it went far beyond Buddhological and soteriological issues, with important practical consequences. This was particularly the case in the arenas of social ideology and economics, and influenced the ways in which religious institutions defined themselves and their own properties.

The three chapters that compose this book address different but related subjects. Chapter One presents the main doctrinal and philosophical aspects of the status of nonsentients and objects in

4 The term "ecosophia" was first used by Félix Guattari in his *Les trois écologies*, 1989. I employ it in a different way.

general in Japan. I begin with an excursus on Chinese treatments of the subject, which constituted the background to subsequent Japanese interventions. Then, I introduce the two main forms of Japanese ecognosis, those developed within the Tendai and Shingon traditions, through a discussion of the most significant texts on plants becoming buddhas. Chapter Two discusses "popular" discourses and practices concerning trees as instances of ecopietas. I attempt to show that ecopietas-like attitudes, rather than being a mere manifestation of primordial and Shintō animistic beliefs, were also the result of struggles and negotiations between Buddhist institutions supported by the state and local social structures or life-styles. Chapter Three deals with the ideological effects of the doctrines on plants becoming buddhas. There I criticize received ideas that such doctrines are manifestations of a typically and uniquely Japanese attitude towards nature and the environment, rooted in an essentially ahistorical vision of Shintō. In particular, I discuss a number of cases of prohibitions against cutting trees issued by religious institutions in medieval Japan: their rhetoric as well as their historical and social contexts show that religious institutions were interested in trees not particularly out of environmental concerns (even though those were present), but in their attempt to establish their own social role and influence. In this sense, the theme of plants becoming buddhas becomes a metaphor for larger issues, such as the relations between religious institutions and the state, and ideas of social order and domination.

An earlier version of some portions of this monograph was originally published in Italian,[5] being part of a larger, ongoing project on Buddhist materialities in Japan. The book developed directly out of a lecture I was invited to give by Antonino Forte at the Italian School for East Asian Studies in Kyōto in May, 2000. I wish to express my gratitude to Nino for his encouragement and support. I am also indebted to Silvio Vita for his comments on the final version of the manuscript, and to Jonathan Grossman and Michael Como for their many suggestions during the editorial process. My warmest thanks also go to friends and colleagues for their insightful questions and comments: in particular, Aramaki Noritoshi 荒牧典俊, Robert Duquenne, Irene Lin, John LoBreglio, Inoue Takami 井上尚美, and Murakami Tatsuo 村上辰雄. Many

[5] Fabio Rambelli, "'Piante e alberi diventano buddha.' La natura nel paradigma *hongaku tendai*," 1993.

thanks also to the students in my 2001-2002 seminar on Japanese religion at the Graduate School for Cultural Studies, Sapporo University, with whom I discussed some of the ideas presented here. Finally, I am grateful to Sapporo University itself, which provided an academic research grant for help with this project during the 2001-2002 academic year.

I dedicate this work to my grandmother, Paola Morsiani, and to the memory of my grandfather, Biagio (Tonino) Baldini, with love and gratitude.

CHAPTER 1

ECOSOPHIA AND ECOGNOSIS: BUDDHIST DOCTRINES OF THE NONSENTIENT

The Status of Nonsentients in East Asian Buddhism

In its soteriology early Indian Buddhism generally distinguished living beings transmigrating in the Six Destinations from plants and other nonsentient beings. Salvation was only possible for living beings. Even classical Mahāyāna Buddhism tended to exclude the possibility of inanimate objects becoming buddhas, as we can see, for example, in Bhāvaviveka's criticism of the Mīmāṃsā idea that plants had a mind.[1] It is, however, with the development of the Tantric tradition in India that the doctrine of nondualism began to affect the soteriological position of the nonsentients.

The question of whether nonsentients possessed Buddha-nature or not was part of the discussions on the limits of salvation that animated Chinese Buddhism from the fifth century. Before the issue of nonsentients was taken up specifically, there were lingering questions about the soteriological status of sentient beings to clarify. Daosheng 道生 (355-434) presented a radically innovative position, according to which all sentient beings are endowed with Buddha-nature and can therefore become buddhas. This idea was later confirmed by the new translation of the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* made by Dharmakṣema (Tanwuchan 曇無讖, 385-433 or 436).[2] However, such an expanded interpretation could be seen as imposing new limits: even though the possibility to become buddha had been extended to all sentient beings, it still presupposed a dichotomy between the sentients and the nonsentients. The *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* clearly defines "all inanimate objects such as

1 Kawasaki Shinjō 川崎信定, "Bhāvaviveka no seiruikan" Bhāvaviveka の生類観, 1986.

2 The *Dabanniepan jing* 7.405b, 27.522-528, *et passim*, states that "all living beings are endowed with Buddha-nature" (*yiqie zhongsheng xi you foxing* 一切衆生悉有佛性).

walls and stones" (*yiqie qiangbi washi wuqing zhi wu* 一切牆壁瓦石無情之物) as "devoid of Buddha-nature" (*fei foxing* 非佛性).[3] In the terms of Mahāyāna nondualism such a dichotomy between sentients and nonsentients could be interpreted as a mark of delusion.

Chinese monks began to consider—we do not know exactly when—what it would mean for a plant to become a buddha. Was it possible to apply to plants the standard Buddhist process of salvation? Discussions focused on whether it was conceivable that plants and inanimate objects in general engage in the standard soteriological process: whether they arouse the desire for enlightenment (Ch. *fa puti xin*, Jp. *hotsu bodaishin* 發菩提心), perform religious practices (Ch. *xiuxing*, Jp. *shugyō* 修行), and finally become buddhas (Ch. *chengfo*, Jp. *jōbutsu* 成佛). These ideas will be known later in Japan through a formula first used in China by Jizang 吉藏 (549-623), the famous Sanlun 三論 author of Persian origin: *caomu chengfo* 草木成佛, i.e."plants become buddhas" (*sōmoku jōbutsu* in Japanese.). However, this expression is rather rare in Chinese Buddhism, the most common phrases utilized to transmit the same idea being *wuqing chengfo* (Jp. *mujō jōbutsu*) 無情成佛 and *feiqing chengfo* (Jp. *hijō jōbutsu*) 非情成佛 ("nonsentient beings become buddhas").[4]

The debate over the salvation of plants engendered different positions.[5] Those who denied that the nonsentients have the possibility of becoming buddhas emphasized that only sentient beings possess Buddhahood and that becoming buddha is the final outcome of an ascetic process possible only to beings endowed with mind. The Yogācāra tradition (Ch. Faxiang 法相, Jp. Hossō) further limited the category of beings who could become buddhas to those having the innate seed of Buddhahood (*tathāgatagarbha*, Jp. *busshu* 佛種). In contrast, many other schools maintained that the dichotomous notions of sentients and non-sentients lying at the base

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3 *Dabanniepan jing* 37.581a.

4 In this context, it is interesting to note that the well-known Japanese locution *sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu* 草木國土悉皆成佛 ("plants and the territory all become buddhas") does not have Chinese precedents. It appears for the first time in a text written in Japan by the Tendai priest Annen 安然 in the second half of the ninth century.

5 For a general overview, see Miyamoto Shōson 宮本正尊, "'Sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu' no busshōronteki igi to sono sakusha" 「草木国土悉皆成仏」の仏性論的意義とその作者, 1961, pp. 672-674.

of the previous position should be overcome nondualistically, since sentients and nonsentients were both essential parts of absolute reality (Sk. *tathātā*, Jp. *shinnyo* 真如).

The idea that plants have Buddha-nature and can therefore become buddhas is already present in essence in Huiyuan 慧遠 (523-592), who wrote that even though plants and the nonsentients lack a mind, still Buddha-nature inheres in them. Jizang, who as we have already seen, was the first to use the expression *caomu chengfo*, shared the same opinion. In his *Dasheng xuanlun* 大乗玄論 he argues that "if the water of the sea and the precious trees in the Lotus Realm can preach the Dharma, we should conclude that they are endowed with Buddha-nature," evidently basing this idea on numerous scriptural passages about inanimate objects delivering sermons on the Dharma. For Jizang, the presence of Buddha-nature—and therefore the possibility of salvation—was directly related to enlightenment: the enlightened one posesses Buddha-nature, while the deluded ones do not. In this sense, there were times in which plants had Buddha-nature, and moments in which they did not.[6] Even more radically the Tiantai patriarch Zhiyi 智顗 (538-597), treated the sensorial features of plants as indications of their innate Buddha-nature. His famous sentence "no single color or perfume differs from the Middle Path" (一色一香無非中道)[7] later became one of the key sources used by Japanese Tendai exegetes to address the issue of the Buddhahood of nonsentients.

During the Tang period, Huayan 華嚴, Tiantai 天台, Chan 禪 and other traditions developed justifications for the possibility of the nonsentients to become buddhas, each on the basis of its own scriptures, vocabulary, and imageries.[8] These doctrines were not exempt from criticism, especially because they could degenerate into an overly simplistic theory of emptiness.[9] In the same period,

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6 *Dasheng xuanlun* 3.40a-41b.

7 *Mohezhiguan* 摩訶止觀 1.1c.

8 On the heterogeneous nature of the concept of plants becoming buddhas in China, see for example Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄, "Sanronshū, Gozu-Zen, Dōkyō wo musubu shisōshiteki keifu: sōmoku jōbutsu wo tegakari to shite" 三論宗・牛頭禪・道教を結ぶ思想史的系譜—草木成仏を手がかりとして, 1968, pp. 79-89; *Chūgoku Kegon shisōshi no kenkyū* 中国華嚴思想史の研究, 1965 (1978), pp. 434-474; Sakamoto Yukio 坂本幸男, *Daijō bukkyō no kenkyū* 大乗仏教の研究, 1980, pp. 384-396.

9 See Miyamoto, 1961, pp. 683-686.

the sixth Tiantai patriarch, Zhanran 湛然 (711-782), wrote texts that marked an important development in the debate. One in particular, the *Jinggang bei* 金剛錍, presented a systematic treatment that became influential in the Japanese Tendai tradition. Zhanran based his theory on the nondualism of sentient beings and their environment (*yibao buer*, Jp. *ehō funi* 依報不二), the all-pervasiveness of the universal Mind (*xinwai wubiefa*, Jp. *shinge mubeppō* 心外無別法), and the absolute nature of conditioned phenomena (*suiyuan bubian*, Jp. *zuien fuhen* 隨緣不變).[10]

According to Fung Yu-lan, Zhanran represents the highest point of Mahāyāna universalistic doctrines in the history of Chinese Buddhism.[11] William LaFleur, on the other hand, limits the impact of Zhanran's ideas, in that the Tiantai patriarch "holds to the Buddha-nature of the natural world not primarily because he is interested in the natural world and its religious meaning, but because the logic of Mahāyāna universalism is that to which he is specially sensitive."[12] However, if it is difficult to identify the highest point of a discursive formation—anonymous, diffuse, and in continuous transformation—it is also overly reductive to think that Zhanran was only interested in the mechanics of Mahāyāna discourse as separate from an interest in the soteriological value of the natural world that he saw as imbued with Buddha-nature. Zhanran's ideas, therefore, need to be assessed as part of their concrete historical and intellectual context rather than from LaFleur's abstract perspective.

The debate within Chinese Buddhism on the possibility for the nonsentients to become buddhas did not end in the Tang period. Subsequent developments during the Song, especially in Chan circles, influenced Japanese discussions on the subject in the Kamakura period, even though the extent of such an influence has never been investigated fully.[13]

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10 On Zhanran's ontology and soteriology of inanimate objects, see also his *Zhiguan fuxing zhuan hong jue*.

11 Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, 1953 (1983), vol. 2, p. 386.

12 William LaFleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature. Part One," 1973, p. 97. The sections of this article dedicated to the *sōmoku jōbutsu* concept are still the most complete essay on the subject in English. However, as I will show in this monograph, they present several problems.

13 But see, for example, Tamura Yoshirō 田村芳朗, "Tendai hongaku shisō gaisetsu" 天台本覚思想概説, 1973, p. 537; *Hongaku shisōron* 本覚思想論, 1991, pp. 347-363.

In Japan, the discourse on the ontological and soteriological status of nature and the nonsentients was structured along three orders of significance, or discursive regimes, within the dominant *kenmitsu* 顕密 Buddhism.[14] I call these three ecosophia, ecognosis, and ecopietas.

Ecosophia refers to Mahāyana doctrines which make a clear distinction between sentients and nonsentients in terms of the possibility of becoming buddha. Authors traditionally maintain that even though the nonsentients are endowed with Buddha-nature in principle (*ri busshō* 理佛性), they lack Buddha-nature in practice (*gyō busshō* 行佛性), and therefore cannot "become buddhas" through their own agency. Their theoretical Buddha-nature only allows for an indirect, passive salvation, as for example when a Buddha contemplates his environment with his third eye and sees that everything is non-distinct, non-differentiated from himself. Only in this sense can plants "become buddhas." In addition, they play no direct role in the salvation of sentient beings.

Ecognosis, in contrast, has to do with the initiatory doctrines developed in medieval Japan by the so-called Tendai *hongaku* 本覺 traditions[15] and the various Shingon 眞言 denominations. Whereas the former are well known, the latter have received little attention by scholars. As we will see in greater detail, even though Shingon and Tendai discourses are quite different from each other, both agree that the nonsentients (nature, the environment, and inanimate objects) are endowed with Buddha-nature. They either become buddhas or are already in a Buddha-like state, and as such, they can exert a salvific influence over sentient beings. Salvation can thus derive from interaction with apparently inanimate objects. In this way, ecognosis was based on ecosophia, the conclusions of which it reversed. It also developed an epistemology of the nonsentients to teach sentient beings how to interpret the nonsentients' signs and recognize their essentially animate nature; it was also intimately connected, therefore, to ecopietas and its

[14] On *kenmitsu* Buddhism, see Kuroda Toshio 黒田俊雄, *Nihon chūsei no kokka to shūkyō* 日本中世の国家と宗教, 1975; Satō Hiroo 佐藤弘夫, *Nihon chūsei no kokka to bukkyō* 日本中世の国家と仏教, 1986; Taira, 1991; James C. Dobbins, ed., *The Legacy of Kuroda Toshio*, 1996. See also Fabio Rambelli, "True Words, Silence, and the Adamantine Dance," 1994.

[15] On Tendai *hongaku* doctrines, see in particular Tada Kōryū 多田厚隆 *et al.*, eds., *Tendai hongaku ron* 天台本覚論, 1973; Tamura, 1991; Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Buddhism*, 1999.

ritual practices.

In this chapter I mainly address ecognosis, from Tendai and Shingon perspectives. The choice to do so is motivated by the wealth of doctrinal debates on the status of the nonsentients within the Shingon and Tendai traditions, and their impact on many aspects of premodern Japanese culture. While these two traditions critically addressed analogous doctrines developed by other schools, such as Hossō and Kegon, they also influenced the theories of new medieval Buddhism in movements such as Hokke 法華 (Nichiren 日蓮), Zen, and the Pure Land denominations in a process that still needs to be fully addressed in detail.

Tendai Ecognosis

The problem of vegetal Buddhahood was discussed within the Tendai school as one of the subjects of the so-called "Tendai *giron* 天台議論," dialogical debates on important doctrinal issues that were later edited and collected in written treatises. In these documents, the textual position of the "questions" usually represents an extra-sectarian or heterodox position, to be criticized by the "answers" indicating the orthodoxy of that particular textual lineage. The initial questions are often quite standard, and approximately represent the Hossō doctrines on the subject.[16] According to the "question," plants are nonsentient entities (*hijō*); as such, they cannot arouse the desire for enlightenment and perform religious practices. As a consequence, they cannot become buddhas (*jōbutsu*). The replies to this position changed according to the lineage and the historical period, in accordance with doctrinal developments within the Tendai tradition, and especially according to *hongaku* (original enlightenment) initiatory schools that exercised a sort of monopoly on these issues.[17] In any case, the scriptural body of

[16] Hossō was the traditional rival of Tendai, not only in terms of doctrines but also in more secular matters such as court politics, economics, and control over the territory. Particularly famous are the periodical struggles opposing Enryakuji 延暦寺 and Kōfukuji 興福寺 as well as their branch temples. In this heated atmosphere, doctrinal debates also acquired extra-philosophical significance.

[17] The hegemonic role of Tendai doctrines of "original enlightenment," however, does not mean that they did not face criticism. Particularly important opponents were Shōshin 證眞 (active 1153-1207) and, later, Reikū Kōken 靈空光謙 (1652-1739). The latter's criticism against the Genshi kimyōdan 玄旨帰命壇 movements marked, according to Tamura Yoshirō 田村芳朗 (Tamura, 1973, p. 478), the

reference, the rhetorical apparatus, and the conceptual vocabulary remained rather stable throughout the centuries.[18] All these doctrines were also influential in medieval literature, performing arts, and *ikebana*.[19] I will examine, then, some of the most influential Tendai treatments of the subject.

After Annen's discussion, which was the starting point for subsequent authors, three texts represent the most significant doctrinal developments. They are the *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki* 草木發心修行成佛記, (Record On Plants Arousing the Desire [for Enlightenment], Performing Religious Practices, and Becoming Buddhas) attributed to Ryōgen 良源 (912-985), the *Sanjūshika no kotogaki* 三十四箇事書 (Notes on Thirty-four Items) also known in its later variant titled *Makura no sōshi* 枕雙紙 (Pillow Book), attributed to Genshin 源信 (942-1017), and the *Kankō ruijū* 漢光類聚 (Classified Collection of the Light of the Han), a Tendai *hongaku* encyclopedia, attributed to Chūjin 忠尋 (1065-1138).[20] It is important to remember, however, that the Tendai tradition also developed a different approach to the issue of the Buddhahood of plants that was based on the doctrines of esoteric Buddhism. As I will address esoteric visions of inanimate objects in the section dedicated to Shingon ecognosis, I will only report here Enchin's 圓珍 (814-891) argument that plants become buddhas as part of Mahāvairocana's universal body. He wrote that Mahāvairocana called plants and nonsentients "a separate body of mine" (*onore ga bunshin* 己が分身) and ordered Fudō Myōō 不動明王 to make them become buddhas.[21] Statements

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end of *hongaku* thought and ritual practices. *Genshi kimyōdan* (literally, "profound purport" and "altar of faith") is the collective term designating two forms of radical interpretation of doctrines and practices related to the concept of original enlightenment, which developed in medieval Tendai. Its extreme form of nondualism, emphasizing negative aspects of the human condition (afflictions, etc.) as the supreme embodiments of Thusness, raised much criticism as intrinsically heretical.

18 For a historical overview of Tendai discussions of vegetal Buddhahood, see Miyamoto, 1961; Tamura, 1991. See also Misaki Gisen 三崎義泉, "Sōmoku jōbutsu shisō no gaikan" 草木成仏思想の概観, 1975; Asai Endō 浅井円道, *Jōko Nihon Tendai hōmon shisōshi* 上古日本天台法門思想史, 1973, esp. pp. 155-159, 233-236, 355, 570-573, 752-757.

19 On this, see for example Tamura, 1973, pp. 541-545; 1990, pp. 70-71, 457-495.

20 None of the traditional authorships is correct, since the texts, as we shall see, appear to have been written later during the middle ages.

21 Quoted in Misaki, 1975, p. 89.

like this constantly remind us of the close proximity of ecosophia, ecognosis, and ecopietas in premodern Japanese discourses on inanimate objects.

1. Annen and the Modalities of Plants' Salvation

The first person in Japan to offer a systematic doctrine of the ontological status and soteriological possibilities of plants was perhaps Annen 安然 (841-895?). He endeavored to prove that plants are actually sentient and are therefore able to become buddhas on the basis of their own agency.[22] Annen's central idea is best summarized by the following passage from his *Taizō kongō bodaishingi ryaku mondō shō* 胎藏金剛菩提心義略問答抄 (Annotations from an Abridged Dialogue on the Concept of *Bodhicitta* as Related to the Womb and Vajra Mandalas):

> 草木雖滅色性不滅。遍一切處更無來去。如此性相眞如為體。眞如體故常有覺性。有覺性故發心成佛。
>
> Even though plants die, their material essence does not. It pervades every place wthout the least mutation over time. Such being the character of their nature, Thusness constitutes its essence. Since Thusness is its essence, they always have the capability of awakening, and because they have the capability of awakening they arouse the desire for enlightenment and become buddhas.[23]

In the same work, Annen posited four ways or modes in which plants can become buddhas, namely: (i) by relying on their own mind (*jieshin* 自依心), (ii) by relying on someone else's mind (*taeshin* 他依心), (iii) by relying on both their own and someone else's mind (*kyōeshin* 共依心), and (iv) by relying neither on their own mind, nor on someone else's, nor in the combination of the two (*hiji hita hikyō eshin* 非自非他非共依心).[24] These four possibilities lie at the base of later developments in the *Kankō ruijū* that we will examine below.

The first mode depends on the notion that the realm of inanimate things (*kisekai* 器世界), like the realm of sentient beings, is a

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[22] On Annen's doctrines concerning plants and the nonsentients, see Shinkawa Tetsuo 新川哲雄, *Annen no hijō jōbutsugi kenkyū* 安然の非情成仏義研究, 1992.

[23] *Taizō kongō bodaishingi ryaku mondō shō*, 2.487c.

[24] *Taizō kongō bodaishingi ryaku mondō shō*, esp. 2.485b-488. See also Shinkawa, 1992, pp. 94-96.

transformation of Thusness. If Thusness can become the starting point for the attainment of sentient beings, the same should also be true for inanimate things, since both share the same origin. The second mode is explained by offering an ostensible quotation from the *Zhongying jing* (Jp. *Chūingyō*) 中陰經 (which in fact does not exist in the text): "When Śākyamuni attained enlightenment, all plants turned into the buddha-body and preached the Dharma." The idea here is that when someone becomes a buddha his or her karmic environment must also reveal its Buddha-nature because of the nondualism of karmic body and karmic environment. The third mode of attainment consists in the fact that plants become buddhas because of both their embodying the absolute principle and their being transformations of the supreme Buddha. Finally, the fourth mode involves a discursive transformation of Tendai meditation techniques, according to which Buddha-nature, being empty, cannot be defined in positive terms.

However, the most complete exposition of Annen's theories on the salvation of plants can be found in the *Kantei sōmoku jōbutsu shiki* 斟定草木成佛私記 (A Personal Collection of Selected Passages on Plants Becoming Buddhas), a sort of critical edition of several scriptural passages and commentaries used to ground his own speculations. The text, probably written between 869-885, does not argue whether plants become buddhas or not; it simply takes for granted their possibility of salvation and focuses instead on soteriological modalities, and especially on the question of whether plants engage themselves in religious practice.[25] On a theoretical level, the underlying assumption is Annen's well-known view that the "only and single mind" (*yuiisshin* 唯一心), as the mental essence of the universe, is a synonym of Thusness. In this sense, there is no ontological difference between sentients and nonsentients: both are endowed with the universal mind and substance, and with Buddha-nature. In Annen's words plants are nonseparate from the mind "like water and waves," and therefore "since plants are mind they become buddhas,"[26] an argument he also repeats with regard to the nondualism of karmic environment

[25] The *Kantei sōmoku jōbutsu shiki* has never been published in modern times; printed copies from the Edo period are preserved at various institutions. I was able to read the copy at Tōyō University library, which I thank for their kind assistance. For a preliminary study of this text, see Sueki Fumihiko, "Annen *Kantei sōmoku jōbutsu shiki* ni tsuite" 安然斟定草木成仏私記について, 1990.

[26] *Kantei sōmoku jōbutsu shiki*, seventh dialogue.

and karmic body.[27]

2. Plants Become Buddhas: The *Sōmoku Hosshin Shugyō Jōbutsu Ki* Attributed to Ryōgen

An important episode in the monastic career ofRyōgen (912-985, also known as Ganzan Daishi 元三大師, Jie Daishi 慈慧大師 or Tsuno Daishi 角大師, and as one of the "protectors" of Mount Hiei 比叡山) relates him to the issue of the salvation of plants. In 963 he participated in the Ōwa 應和 era debate, opposing a preeminent Hossō scholar monk, Chūzan 仲算, precisely on the question of the enlightenment of plants.[28] This is probably why the *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki* (Record Concerning Plants Arousing the Desire [for Enlightenment], Performing Religious Practices, and Becoming Buddhas) is considered to be a transcription of Ryōgen's oral teachings to Kakuun 覺運 (953-1007). The text, however, was most likely written between the second half of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth.

The originality of this short treatise lies first in the homology it establishes between the biological cycle of plants and the life of sentient beings. In this way, it can articulate the biological continuum of vegetal life through a grid constituted of the four phases of the life of sentient beings (*shisō* 四相) as described in Buddhist scriptures: birth (*shō* 生), stability (*jū* 住), alteration (*i* 異), and extinction (*metsu* 滅). The next move the *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki* makes consists "in his [the author's] creation of a nexus between the biological life cycle of a plant and the process of enlightenment as experienced by human beings (...). When correctly understood (...) the life cycle is an enlightenment cycle."[29] The four phases of the life cycle are identified with the four stages of the Buddhist soteriological process (*shiten* 四點), that is, arousing the desire for enlightenment, religious practice, enlightenment (*bodai*), and finally *nirvāṇa* (*nehan* 涅槃):

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27 *Ibid.*, ninth dialogue.

28 A transcription of the debate appears in the *Jinten ainōshō* 塵添壒嚢鈔 16. 397-399. Ōkubo Ryōshun 大久保良峻 (*Tendai kyōgaku to hongaku shisō* 天台教学と本覚思想, 1998, pp. 65-67) mentions another text attributed to Ryōgen, entitled *Hossōshū jūgi* 法相宗十疑 (Ten Doubts about the Hossō School), which addresses the same issues. On the Ōwa debate see Neil McMullin, "The Lotus Sutra and Politics in the Mid-Heian Period," 1989.

29 LaFleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," 1973, p. 103.

草木既具生住異滅四相。是則草木發心修行菩提涅槃姿也。是豈非有情類耶。

Plants are endowed with the four phases of life (*shisō*): birth, stability, alteration, and death. These are the shapes of [the four stages of soteriology:] arising the desire [for enlightenment], religious practice, *bodhi*, and *nirvāṇa*, as far as plants are concerned. Do plants not then also belong to the category of sentient beings?[30]

This formal similarity between sentients and nonsentients reveals a more profound and significant fact: that the nonsentients are also continuously engaged in a salvific process:

故知草木發心修行時。有情同修行。有情發心修行之時。草木亦發心修行也。(...)一切情非情等有自行化他功德。是故草木同發心修行成佛也。

One should know that when plants arouse the desire [for enlightenment] and perform religious practices, so do sentient beings; and when sentient beings arouse the desire [for enlightenment] and perform religious practices, plants as well arouse the desire [for enlightenment] and perform religious practices (...). All beings, sentient and nonsentient, have the capacity to save themselves and to bring benefits to the others. For this reason, plants also arouse the desire [for enlightenment], perform religious practices, and become buddhas.[31]

In such a vision everything in the universe is engaged in a recursive process aimed at both achieving its own salvation and bringing benefits to other beings. It is an approach heavily influenced by the interpretative strategies of esoteric Buddhism, in their ceaseless search for analogies to explain the coherence of reality.[32] However, the conceptual originality of the *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki* also constitutes its limit. As William LaFleur writes, it "could be seen as something which (...) by implication rules out the Buddhahood possibility for natural objects lacking such a cycle—rocks and rivers, for example."[33] Later authors

30 *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki,* 345a.

31 *Ibid.,* 345a-b.

32 On the recursive soteriology of esoteric Buddhism, see Charles D. Orzech, "Cosmology in Action: Recursive Cosmology, Soteriology, and Authority in Chen-Yen Buddhism with Special Reference to the Monk Pu-k'ung," 1986, and "Seeing Chen-Yen Buddhism: Traditional Scholarship and the Vajrayana in China," 1989.

33 LaFleur, 1973, p. 104

will specify that their treatment applies to all nonsentients, not just to plants—even though that will entail logical and terminological problems. The text is also very obscure concerning the Buddhological status of plants:

> 疑云。於草木者。自雖有理佛性。不可有行佛性。豈具縁了二因成佛耶。答。既許有理佛性。知亦可有行佛性。
>
> Question: even though plants are endowed with Buddha-nature in principle (*ri busshō*), they cannot have Buddha-nature as a result of practice (*gyō busshō*). How can they then possess the circumstantial cause and the final cause and become buddhas?[34]
> Answer: You recognize that they are endowed with Buddha-nature in principle. Well, you should know that they must then also possess Buddha-nature as a result of practice.[35]

Only in later documents we will find more articulated justifications for statements such as this.

The *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki* presents then the salvation of plants as necessary and innate, related as it is to their very existence and life cycle. While this is clearly related to *hongaku* thought, the emphasis on the soteriological process from ignorance to realized buddhas shows that the text was written from the point of view of acquired enlightenment (*shikaku* 始覺), before the development of a systematic vision of original enlightenment. Subsequent texts will deny in ways coherent with their general doctrinal framework the very existence of a soteriological process, and stress instead the idea of innate and original salvation.

3. Plants Do Not Become Buddhas: The *Sanjūshika no kotogaki* Attributed to Genshin

The main point of the *Sanjūshika no kotogaki* (Notes on Thirty-four Items),[36] is that plants *do not* become buddhas, and do not

[34] This is a reference to the Tendai doctrine of the three causal factors of Buddha-nature (Jp. *san'in busshō*, Ch. *sanyin fo xing* 三因仏性). According to Zhiyi, these are the "primary cause" (*zheng ying,* Jp. *shōin* 正因, the principle), the "final cause" (*liao yin*, Jp. *ryōin* 了因, wisdom), and the "circumstantial cause" (*yuan yin*, Jp. *en'in* 縁因, religious practice) needed to realize one's Buddha-nature. On the basis of Zhiyi's theories, Zhanran acknowledged that plants are endowed with the three causal factors.

[35] *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki,* 345b.

[36] Critical edition by Tamura Yoshirō in Tada *et. al*., eds., 1973, pp. 151-185; the section on plants becoming buddhas, from which all passages translated below

even need to try to, because they are "always-already" abiding in an absolute and unconditioned state (*jōjū* 常住). Also known in its later variant bearing the title of *Makura no sōshi* 枕雙紙 (Pillow Book), this text is attributed to Genshin (942-1017), but it was probably written in the first half of the thirteen century.[37]

One of the "thirty-four items" addresses the question of whether plants can become buddhas, developing the argument in two different stages. First, the text counters the thesis that plants are nonsentient and therefore cannot become buddhas. Then, on a deeper, initiatory level, it argues that plants *do not* become buddhas because they are eternal and immutable (*jōjū*) in their vegetal essence. The *Sanjūshika no kotogaki* thus develops the concept of *sōmoku jōbutsu* in a radical fashion by questioning the very idea of "becoming buddha" and by reconfiguring the status of a buddha:

> 一家意。依正不二故、草木成仏之事無疑。但異義無尽也。如常義云。今意実草木不成仏習事深義也。
>
> According to our school, on the basis of the nondualism of sentient beings and environment, there is no doubt that plants become buddhas. However, this has countless interpretations, as the received interpretation and so on. The profound interpretation is that in reality plants do not become buddhas, as in our opinion.[38]

The criticism is directed against positions such as those represented by the *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki*—which is never mentioned—by suggesting that the soteriological potentialities of the vegetal world do not depend on homologies with sentient beings.

Another passage describes well how the *Sanjūshika no kotogaki* conceives of the salvation of the nonsentients:

> 一家意、雖草木非情乍非情施有情徳也、改非情非云有情

are taken, is on pp. 166-167.

[37] See Tamura, 1973, pp. 540-541; Sueki Fumihiko, "Chūsei Tendai to hongaku shisō" 中世天台と本覚思想, 1991, pp. 42-73 (in particular p. 53). At the end of the text appears the name of Chūjin's disciple Kōkaku 皇覺 (second half of the twelfth century), who attributes to Genshin the teachings he writes down. Tamura Yoshirō and Sueki Fumihiko both think that this text was written in the first half of the thirteenth century: (Tamura, 1973, pp. 566-568). On the other hand, it is interesting to note that scholars such as Sakamoto Yukio and Miyamoto Shōson did not question the traditional authorship of *hongaku* texts, thus proposing a mistaken picture of historical developments.

[38] Tada *et al.*, eds., 1973, p. 166.

也、故成仏云人々転非情有情思、全不爾、只乍非情而有情也、能々可思之、

According to our school, although plants are defined as nonsentient beings, even as nonsentients they are endowed with the virtues and capacities of sentient beings. We do not mean to say that nonsentient beings turn into sentient beings first and then become buddhas. This is what people usually think, but it is absolutely not how things are. Simply, while being nonsentient, [plants] are also sentient. One should ponder all this very well.[39]

As the text explains in the same context, since the entire universe (*dharmadhātu*, Jp, *hokkai* 法界) is constituted of beings having "the Dharma in their mind" there is no need for them to change their essence. Everything in the ten worlds (*jikkai* 十界)—sentient beings (*shujō*), the five aggregates and plants in particular—is "stable and immutable" (*jōjū*). Accordingly, beings cannot undergo alterations and turn into something different from what they already are.[40] From this perspective, differences among phenomena are not just accidental, but acquire an ontological dimension that makes them intrinsic and necessary to the very essence of things:

草木依報衆生正報、依報乍依報施十界徳。正法乍正報施正報徳也。若草木成仏、依報減三千世間器世間有咸少也、

Plants constitute the karmic environment (*ehō*), whereas sentient beings are the karmic body (*shōbō*). The karmic environment, precisely as karmic environment, produces the virtues of the Ten Worlds; the karmic body,[41] precisely as karmic body, produces the virtues of the karmic body. If plants became buddhas, then the karmic environment would decrease. Now, how could the inanimate entities in the trichiliocosm decrease?[42]

Should nonsentients turn into buddhas, then the total number of buddhas would increase, while the dimensions of the material

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39 *Ibid.*

40 *Ibid. Goun* 五蘊 are the five psycho-physical aggregates (*skandha*) constituting reality: material forms (*shiki* 色), perception (*ju* 受), ideation (*sō* 想), volition and activity (*gyō* 行), and mind (*shiki* 識).

41 The text has here "True Dharma" (*shōbō* 正法), but it is probably a mistake for 正報 (karmic body).

42 The term *sanzen* 三千 (lit. "three thousand") refers to the three thousand world systems that constitute our universe according to Tendai cosmology; in *hongaku* texts, this term designates the phenomenal multiplicity of reality as opposed to its underlying sameness (*ichinen* 一念, lit. "one thought").

world would decrease. As the text says, "at the end there would be only the realm of the buddhas."

It is precisely this possibility—a general homologation at the top of the cosmic hierarchy or, in other words, a general equality as the result of soteriology—that the initiatory lineages among which the *Sanjūshika no kotogaki* circulated wanted to avoid. In fact, the *Sanjūshika no kotogaki* appears to reveal the political significance that the doctrines concerning the soteriology of plants could acquire in medieval Japan. If nonsentients became buddhas, the cosmic order, which the exponents of *hongaku* tradition wanted static and immutable, would also undergo an irreparable change. One day, when everyone and everything had reached the state of buddha, the cosmic hierarchy of beings lying at the foundations of social control in medieval Japan would dissolve into an egalitarian society—a perspective that the leading ideologues of the major religious institutions wanted to avoid at any cost. To prevent this possibility even on a merely theoretical level, they were ready to modify the very concept of "buddha." In the *Sanjūshika no kotogaki*, this term refers to the top of the cosmic hierarchy of beings and corresponds on earth to the members of the *hongaku* tradition and, more generally, to the ruling elites of *kenmitsu* religious institutions. I will return to these issues in the final section of the next chapter.

4. Plants as the Unconditioned: The *Kankō ruijū* Attributed to Chūjin

The *Kankō ruijū* (Classified Collection of the Light of the Han), a sort of Tendai *hongaku* encyclopedia,[43] is attributed to Chūjin (1065-1138), but it was probably composed during the second half of the thirteenth century.[44] It contains perhaps the most systematic exposition of Tendai *hongaku* ideas about plants becoming buddhas, and it also includes references to a number of non-Tendai doctrines. A major contribution of this text concerns

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[43] Critical edition by Ōkubo Ryōjun 大久保良順 in Tada *et al*., eds., 1973, pp. 187-286. The sections dealing most directly with *sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrines are on pp. 215-220.

[44] Tamura, 1973, pp. 540-541; Sueki, 1991. On the nature of Tendai *hongaku* texts and their systematic attribution to past masters, see Tamura, 1973;1991; Kuroda Toshio, "Historical Consciousness and Hon-jaku Philosophy in the Medieval Period on Mount Hiei," 1989; Ishida Yoshito 石田義人, "Kuden kyōgaku no taisei" 口伝教学の体制, 1967; and Stone, 1999.

the ontological status of the nonsentients and the epistemological problems related to it. As a part of Thusness (*shinnyo*), the vegetal world is endowed with the two fundamental qualities of *dharmatā* (Jp. *hosshō* 法性, i.e. the essence of the supreme Dharma): Quiescence (*jaku* 寂, i.e. the principle of nondifferentiation and integration of all phenomena within absolute reality) and Radiance (*shō* 照, i.e. the principle of differentiation and multiplicity). These two principles are in turn connected to two modalities of initiatory understanding of reality based on Tendai visualization practices, focusing respectively on *ichinen* 一念 (literally "one thought," indicating the single, all-embracing instant of thought that captures the essential unity of the universe) and *sanzen* 三千 (literally "three thousand," a term referring to the trichiliocosm mentioned in the *Lotus Sūtra* and indicating the multiplicity of the real). In this way, the ontology of the nonsentient comes to be intertwined with epistemology and religious practice.

The *Kankō ruijū* also analyses in depth the concept of "becoming buddha" (*jōbutsu*), interpreted as "being endowed with the Middle Way" (*chūdō* 中道, i.e., the overcoming of all dualism). In a sense, its treatment of plants is an extended meditation on the previously quoted passage from Zhiyi's *Mohe zhiguan*: "no single color or perfume differs from the Middle Path."[45] In particular, the salvation of the vegetal world is systematically explained through seven arguments listed in an increasingly esoteric order, from standard Mahāyāna views to the initiatory doctrines of mid-medieval Tendai *hongaku* circles: (i) the vision of the buddhas, (ii) the principle of possession of Dharma-nature (*dharmatā*), (iii) the nondualism of karmic environment and karmic body, (iv) the autonomous and unconditioned nature of material phenomena, (v) the innate possession of the three Buddha-bodies, (vi) the sublime and incomprehensible character of Dharma-nature, and (vii) possession of the Middle Way.[46]

Each of these must be considered in detail:

(i) The vision of the buddhas (*shobutsu kangen* 諸佛觀見): in their essence plants cannot become buddhas, but when buddhas meditate on them the appearance of plants becomes the very susbstance of the buddhas.

(ii) The principle of possession of Dharma-nature (*dharmatā*)

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45 *Mohe zhiguan* 1.1c. See above p. 8

46 In Tada *et al.*, 1973, pp. 215-217.

(*gu hosshō ri* 具法性理): as part of Thusness (*shinnyo*)—that is, ultimate reality—plants are endowed with the principle of absolute reality. Accordingly, they do become buddhas, but only in principle, not as the result of religious practice.

These two positions correspond to the traditional Mahāyāna ideas of the Hossō school—what I call "ecosophia." The nonsentients cannot become buddhas through their own agency: their salvation depends either on the vision of a realized Buddha or remains latent.

(iii) The nondualism of karmic environment and karmic body (*eshō funi* 依正不二): "karmic environment and karmic body (...), being completely interpenetrated and interdependent, form a sole substance." Therefore, since Śākyamuni has attained enlightenment, the karmic environment in which he lived—that is, our universe—must also necessarily be enlightened.

This is another form of ecosophia, similar to Kegon ideas on the subject. The nonsentients do become buddhas but still not autonomously, only as a consequence of Śākyamuni's enlightenment.

(iv) The autonomous and unconditioned nature of material phenomena (*tōtai jishō* 當體自性): "each single grain of dust is in itself the substance of a buddha" (*buttai* 佛體). For this reason, to become buddhas "it is not necessary that plants acquire such things as the thirty-two marks [of the Buddha-body]." Plants are already in themselves buddhas "with their roots, stem or trunk, branches and leaves." In other words, "to become a buddha" simply means to have one's original form, i.e., to be (and remain) the way one is.

Here we are on the threshold separating ecosophia and ecognosis, with a step meant to represent the Shingon doctrines from a Tendai perspective.

(v) The innate possession of the three Buddha bodies (*hongu sanjin* 本具三身): as part of Thusness, plants innately possess the unproduced triple body of the Buddha (*musa sanjin* 無作三身). In this sense plants constitute the very substance of Buddha-nature independently of whether one is aware of it or not, in a condition called by the text "the true Buddha before awakening." Actually, the original Buddha-nature of the three bodies can only be understood in a communication "between buddha and buddha," an expression that is explicitly used in the text to refer to "the perfectly enlightened ascetics"—in other words, to the Tendai authors of these doctrines.

(vi) The sublime and incomprehensible character of Dharma-nature (*hosshō fushigi* 法性不思議): the substance of plants is

absolute because it transcends the opposition of abstract principle (*ri* 理) and its concrete manifestations (*ji* 事).

(vii) To be endowed with the Middle Way (*gu chūdō* 具中道): the identity of mind with the thinkable entails that plants are caused by the mind. At the same time they are the substance of mind itself. For this reason, every utterance is true and always refers to an object or a quality of reality. The very possibility of thinking that "plants become buddhas" means that a level of reality exists in which this sentence refers to a state of the world and is true. This position assumes that the thinkable is the real—a sort of Japanese version of a Spinozan ideal universe.

These last three steps summarize the Tendai *hongaku* doctrines relating to nonsentient buddhas—i.e., Tendai ecognosis. The fact that plants become buddhas is represented in the text as always-already realized rather than as a process yet to be accomplished. Furthermore, in steps (vi) and (vii) the salvation of plants does not take place through models external to the vegetal world itself, such as the life cycle of sentient beings and the marks of the Buddha-body.

The *Kankō ruijū* thereby sanctions the definitive attribution of religious significance to nature and the world of inanimate objects as well as the possibility of their religious valorization. Moreover, in order to sanction the soteriological status of the inanimates, the text develops a psychophysiology of plants and the nonsentients based on the secret doctrine of the three kinds of mind. This is based on a spurious citation from Nāgārjuna's *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論:[47]

> 大論云。心有三種、一矣栗陀、二干栗陀、三質多心。矣栗陀干栗陀是草木、質多心是衆生心。草木無心之言出自小乗非摩訶衍義云。

> The *Great Treatise* [that is, the *Dazhidu lun*] states: "There are three kinds of heart/mind: *yilituo* (Jp. *irida*) 矣栗陀, *ganlituo* (Jp. *karida*) 干栗陀, and *zhiduoxin* (Jp. *jittashin*) 質多心. *Yilituo* and *ganlituo* are the heart/mind of plants, while *zhiduoxin* is of sentient beings. The idea that plants have no mind comes from Hīnayāna, it is not a Mahāyāna one."[48]

In the passage above, *karida* (or *ganlituo*) is a transliteration

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[47] The passage quoted in the *Kankō ruijū* cannot be found in Nāgārjuna's *Dazhidu lun* as it is published in T. vol. 25, no. 1509, pp. 57-756.

[48] *Kankō ruijū*, in Tada *et al*., 1973, p. 219 (original text on p. 381).

of the Sanskrit word *hṛdaya*, which refers to the anatomical heart, the "flesh pellet" (*nikudan* 肉團) as it was commonly called. *Irida* (*yilituo*) is perhaps another transliteration of the same Sanskrit word, and seems to refer to the center, the core of things. *Jittashin* (*zhiduoxin*) comes from the Sanskrit *citta* and refers to the mind, the cognitive faculty located in the heart. The *Kankō ruijū* further develops this passage by using the metaphors of front (*omote* 表) and back (*ura* 裏):

> 心有三種、謂矣栗陀干栗陀質多心也。矣栗陀干栗陀俱草木心也。草木知四季時節枝葉生長矣栗陀心也。衆生質多心為面矣栗陀干栗陀為裏。草木矣栗陀汗栗陀為面質多心為裏。
>
> There are three kinds of mind: *irida*, *karida*, and *jittashin*. Both *irida* and *karida* are the physical heart and the mind of plants. The growth of branches and leaves in plants and the knowledge they have of the seasons' cycle is due to the *irida*. Whereas in sentient beings the *jittashin* is on the front (*omote*) and *irida* and *karida* remain on the back (*ura*), in plants *irida* and *karida* are on the front and the *jittashin* remains on the back.[49]

This heart/mind multiplicity and front/back dualism is not typical of plants alone, but appears to be a more general phenomenon, as we see in another inauthentic passage from the *Dazhidu lun* quoted in the text:

> 無色衆生隠矣栗陀干栗陀心以質多心而持命根。無想天衆生以矣栗陀干栗陀心而持命根。質多心不現在。
>
> Sentient beings in the Formless [Realm] hide *yilituo* and *ganlituo* and their life is sustained by *zhiduoxin*. In the case of sentient beings living in the Heaven of No-thought (*wuxiang tian*, Jp. *musōten*), their life is sustained by *yilituo* and *ganlituo*, whereas the *zhiduoxin* does not seem to be directly present.[50]

In other words, sentient beings in our world resemble those of the Formless Realm,[51] while nonsentient beings resemble sentient beings in the Heaven of No-thought.[52] This doctrine explains why

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49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*

51 The Formless Realm (*mushikikai*) is one of the three worlds (*sangai*, Ch, *sanjie*), together with the Realm of desire (*yokukai*, Ch.. *yujie*) and the Realm of Material Forms (*shikikai*, Ch. *sejie*). It is the realm of meditation in which there exist no articulated matter.

52 The Heaven of No-thought (*musōten*) is the thirteenth of eighteen heavens of the

it is a mistake to consider plants as nonsentients: they do have a mind (*jittashin*), they just hide it at the back of their being. Therefore, as the *Kankō ruijū* concludes, "there cannot be any doubt that plants are endowed with the Trichiliocosm" (*sanzen*, the totality of the universe).

This radical identification of sentients and nonsentients raises an important ethical problem. The *Kankō ruijū* asks: "If plants are endowed with a mind, does the action of cutting them constitute a karmic sin like that of killing living beings?" The question is not only legitimate logically, but also in the terms of Buddhist ethics since killing is one of the most serious sins, resulting directly in rebirth into hell. The answer to the question, however, is formulated in a vague and complicated way. First, the text states that "the doctrine of the nondualism of single thought (*ichinen*) and trichiliocosm (*sanzen*), karmic environment (*ehō*) and karmic body (*shōbō*), is the true principle understood by perfectly enlightened ascetics." In other words, the doctrines presented in the *Kankō ruijū* about the nature of sentients and nonsentients are true, but they can only be understood by the members of Tendai initiatory lineages, usually defined as "perfectly enlightened ascetics" (*endon gyōja* 圓頓行者).[53] In particular, "one cannot cast doubts [on this doctrine] on the basis of the discrimination between good and evil," which is itself the result of attachment and afflictions. Enlightenment originating from these doctrines transcends good and evil, as in that state there are no precepts, no sins, and no good deeds. Criticism of the doctrines, then, can be undertaken only by unenlightened people embracing wrong ideas. As the text points out:

> 観音現海人殺魚鳥、是覚者所作也。今草木具三千道理又円人見。故更不可至疑難歟云云。
>
> Kannon appeared one day as a fisherman and killed fish and birds. That was the action of an enlightened being. Our doctrine according to which plants are endowed with the trichiliocosm is

Realm of Material forms (*shikikai*), situated above the Realm of Desire and below the Formless Realm. In this heaven mind exists only at birth and at death; during one's lifetime, beings living there are like plants. Since certain Indian non-Buddhist schools believed that such condition was enlightenment, this heaven is considered the paradise of non-Buddhists in general (*gedō*, Ch. *waidao*).

53 See for example the following passage: "The expression 'only between one buddha and another' refers to the perfectly enlightened ascetics" 唯佛興佛とは即ち圓頓行者を指す (*Kankō ruijū*, in Tada *et al*., eds., 1973, p. 216).

> also based on the vision of perfectly enlightened beings, and therefore should not be doubted or criticized.[54]

This is a reference to a well-known medieval tale justifying fishing as a sacred activity. Here not only is no doctrinal position offered against killing sentient beings and cutting trees as such but even more, such actions do not constitute a sin if they can be explained as the actions of enlightened beings.

The *Kankō ruijū* is not simply justifying the killing of animals or the cutting of trees. As the complexity of its argumentation makes clear, its authors (or its author) were involved in a complex ideological endeavor. First, they (and their readers) were legitimizing themselves as "perfectly enlightened beings" by comparing themselves with Kannon. Second, they situated their doctrines in a conceptual space beyond criticism, a space of nondualism that supposedly transcended false notions of good and evil. Third, they justified common medieval economic practices (fishing, tree cutting) when performed with the authorization of Buddhist institutions. There, such things ceased to be sins and turned into acts of compassion, as in the story about Kannon mentioned above. Finally, they stated that all beings, sentient and nonsentient, can be made use of, even killed, provided that their use is justified by ruling members of religious institutions.

Passages like this—also found in Shingon texts about plants becoming buddhas—indicate that medieval doctrines about the Buddhahood of the nonsentient did not depend on ecological concern, but were conceptual pieces in a much more complicated ideological chess game about legitimacy, salvation, economics, and, ultimately, power.

5. Tendai-related Ecognosis in Other Buddhist Schools

The intellectual prestige, political influence, and economic power of Tendai institutions contributed to the diffusion of *sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrines outside the closed circles of scholar monks. They began to circulate in other Buddhist denominations, especially within certain Shugendō 修験道 lineages[55] as well as among rival religious traditions such as the Ikkōshū, Zen, and Hokkeshū. Even the Hossō scholar-monk Ryōhen 良遍 (1194-1252) addressed

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] Tamura, 1991, pp. 443-455.

himself to Tendai ideas on the salvation of plants in an attempt to accomodate them within the Hossō tradition.[56] Religious reformers such as Shinran 親鸞 (1173-1262), Dōgen 道元 (1200-1253), and Nichiren 日蓮 (1222-1282) in particular, all took up, each in his own way, the issue of the ontological and soteriological status of the nonsentients.[57] What is interesting to note is that most of these approaches consist in what I have defined as ecosophia—that is, they do not usually consider the inanimate world as capable of attaining salvation autonomously. Accordingly, the sacredness of plants is a consequence of a buddha's, or one's own, enlightenment.

Shinran apparently used the exact expression "plants and the territory all become buddhas" (*sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu*) only very late in his life (at the age of eighy-five), in one version of the *Yuishinshō mon'i* 唯信鈔文意 (The Literal Meaning of the *Yuishinshō*, Notes on Salvation by Faith Only). He seems to have understood that expression in terms of what the *Kankō ruijū* called the "vision of the buddhas (*shobutsu kangen*)."[58] For Shinran, the supreme and unconditioned Buddha (*hosshō hosshin* 法性法身) is signless and transcendent. It is only when it manifests itself in this world as Amida, as an *upāya* to save sentient beings (*hōben hosshin* 方便法身), that its grace and salvific power permeates the entire universe, including nonsentient beings.[59]

Dōgen's attitude is much more complex. Significanly, he does not seem to be interested in whether the environment becomes buddha or not. His attention focuses instead on the possibility that natural formations such as mountains, rivers, and trees preach the Dharma—what he calls *mujō seppō* 無情説法 ("the nonsentients preach the Dharma").[60] To him, that question was related to the

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56 On this subject, see Kamata Shigeo, "Nanto kyōgaku no shisōshiteki igi" 南都教学の思想的意義, 1971, p. 538.

57 Tamura, 1973, pp. 546-548; 1991, pp. 325-345, 407-441, 457-467. On Japanese developments of doctrines on plants becoming buddha s, especially from a Tendai-Nichiren perspective, see also Sakamoto, 1980, pp. 397-412 and 413-418 (English translation of the latter:"On the 'Attainment of Buddhahood by Trees and Plants'," *ibid.*, pp. xvii-xxiii).

58 See p. 21.

59 *Yuishinshō mon'i*, T 83, p. 708a; see also Miyamoto 1961, pp. 689-690.

60 See Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼蔵, especially the chapters "Keisei sanshoku" 渓聲山色, in Terada 寺田 and Mizuno 水野, eds., *Shōbōgenzō* vol. 1: 289-299; "Sansuikyō" 山水經, in *ibid.*, 331-341; "Mujō seppō" 無情説法, in *ibid.*, vol. 2: 61-71.

possibility of attaining enlightenment without the guidance of a master (a condition known as *pratyeka-buddha*, Jp. *engaku* 圓覺 or *byakushibutsu* 辟支佛). As Bernard Faure explains in a passage dedicated to Keizan Jōkin 瑩山紹瑾 (1268-1325), but which also applies to Dōgen himself,

> For him the inanimate in question should not be interpreted as the external world (...). It involves the nondualistic state of mind toward which the practitioner should move, an "inanimate" awareness in the sense that, although perfectly lucid, it is stripped of all sentiment, all attachment, all discrimination.[61]

Nichiren addressed the status of nonsentients in several short works, but the most complete treatment appears in a text entitled *Sōmoku jōbutsu kuketsu* 草木成佛口決 (Oral Instructions on Plants Becoming Buddhas).[62] Here he grounds, predictably, the salvation of plants in the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*. *Myōhō* 妙法 ("sublime Dharma," Sk. *saddharma*) would refer to the becoming-buddha of sentient beings (*ujō jōbutsu* 有情成佛), whereas *renge* 蓮華 ("lotus flower") would indicate the becoming-buddha of the nonsentients (*hijō jōbutsu* 非情成佛) Nichiren also deals with the issue of the interpenetration and nondualism of sentients and nonsentients in an original and creative way. He writes: "'sentient beings' refers to the realization of Buddhahood of living beings; 'nonsentients' refers to the realization of Buddhahood of dead beings."[63] In particular, "when we sentient beings die, a *stūpa* (*toba* 塔婆) is erected and consacrated with an eye-opening ceremony (*kaigen kuyō* 開眼供養): this is the realization of Buddhahood of dead beings, and that corresponds to the realization of Buddhahood of plants."[64] Furthermore, "In our body are present both sentient and nonsentient entities. Nails and hair are nonsentients. When one cuts them, it does not hurt. In all other cases, if they are sentient entities, when one cuts them it hurts and one suffers."[65] In other words, for Nichiren the salvation of the nonsentients is based on the *Lotus Sūtra*, in particular on the "lotus" part of its title on the

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61 Bernard Faure, *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, 1996, p. 194.

62 Nichiren, *Sōmoku jōbutsu kuketsu*, in *Nichiren Shōnin ibun* 日蓮聖人遺文, vol. 1, pp. 532-534.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 532.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 533.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 533.

one hand, and on the configuration of the human body on the other. In this way, the dualism of sentient and nonsentient beings is overcome. Yet, Nichiren's emphasis is on the soteriological power of the scripture rather than on the intellectual and ideological possibilities offered by *sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrines themselves, as in the case of Tendai and Shingon philosophical speculations.

To conclude, although the question of plants becoming buddhas was addressed in the Pure Land, Nichiren, and Zen traditions, the doctrines never attained the importance and relevance there that they enjoyed among the various Tendai and Shingon lineages.

Shingon Ecognosis

Kūkai 空海 (774-835) was the first in Japan to mention the possibility of the salvation of plants.[66] The Shingon tradition developed a sophisticated materialistic cosmology according to which the Buddha-body in its absolute aspect (Dharmakāya, Jp. Hosshin 法身) is made up of the six elements that compose the universe: earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness. Objects thus became the legitimate subject of philosophical speculations precisely because of their status as particular manifestations or embodiments of the Buddha-body. Shingon texts dating back to the early ninth century already envision objects in general not just as things, "stuff," but as a full-fledged *maṇḍala*, that is, as the Buddha-body in one of its manifold occurrences.

The Shingon philosophy of objects is grounded in the doctrine of the four kinds of *maṇḍala* (*shiju mandara*). Based on explanations scattered through various texts of the *Jingangding jing* 金剛頂經 lineage,[67] this was presented for the first time by Kūkai in his

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66 He wrote that "even plants become [buddhas]; how much more so sentient beings?," *Unjigi*, 406 a-b.

67 Kūkai mentions the *Jingang ding jing*, but he actually refers to a set of texts belonging to the same lineage, such as *Jingang ding yuqie jing shibahui zhigui* 金剛頂瑜伽經十八會指帰 (T. vol. 18, no. 869, pp. 284a-287c), *Dale jingang bukong zhenshi sanmoye jing banruo bolomituo liqu shi* 大樂金剛不空眞實三昧耶経經般若波羅蜜多理趣釋 (T. vol. 19, no. 1003, pp. 609b, 610a), *Jingangding yuqie Jingangsaduo wu bimi xiuxing niansong yigui* 金剛頂瑜伽金剛薩埵五秘密修行念誦儀軌 (T. vol. 20, no. 1125, pp. 535b, 538c), and the *Dubu tuoluoni mu* 都部陀羅尼目 (T. vol. 18, no. 903, pp. 898c-899a).

Sokushin jōbutsu gi 即身成仏義,[68] and was further developed in the *Shiju mandara gi* 四種曼荼羅義 and its variant, *Shiju mandara gi kuketsu* 四種曼荼羅義口决, two apocryphal texts traditionally attributed to Kūkai.[69] The four- fold typology of mandalas includes: (i) the great *maṇḍala* (*dai mandara* 大曼荼羅), representing the deities in their bodily aspects; (ii) the *maṇḍala* of symbolic objects (*sanmaya mandara* 三昧耶曼荼羅), in which the deities are represented exclusively by their objects (sword, lotus, and so on); (iii) the *dharma maṇḍala* (*hō mandara* 法曼荼羅), in which deities are represented in linguistic form by their mantric seeds; and (iv) the *karma maṇḍala* (*katsuma mandara* 羯磨曼荼羅), usually a three-dimensional representation of the activities and movements of the deities (sculptures in clay or bronze).[70]

This constitutes a cosmological model: *dai mandara* representing sentient beings (*ujō*); *sanmaya mandara* representing their environment, (also defined as the "nonsentient," *hijō*); *katsuma mandara* representing the "differentiated activities and the distinct configurations of the Tathāgata" (the Tathāgata's universal salvific activity); and *hō mandara* representing rules and precepts.[71] Importantly, the *Shiju mandara gi* stresses that such a four-fold articulation is not just a representation of the Tathāgata, but the true form of all phenomena.[72] According to the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, in fact all Tathāgatas have three "secret bodies:" *zi* 字 (Jp. *ji*), or written signs; *yin* 印 (Jp. *in*), or seals (i.e. *mudrā*); and *xingxiang* 形像 (Jp. *gyōzō*), or images and visual representations.[73] As Kūkai explains, *ji* stands for the *hō mandara*, *in* refers to the various symbols (ritual objects) of the deities (i.e. *sanmaya mandara*), and *gyō* indicates the Buddha's body endowed with the Thirty-two signs (i.e. *dai mandara*). In addition, each of these three bodies performs movements and actions that constitute the *katsuma*

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68 *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*, pp. 282c-283a.

69 Modern scholars consider the authenticity of both works dubious, although it appears that during the second half of the Heian period the *Shiju mandara gi* was generally believed to have been written by Kūkai. On the problems of attribution, see Matsuzaki Emizu 松崎恵水, "*Shiju mandara gi* ni tsuite" 四種曼荼羅義について, 1986, pp. 79-90. On *maṇḍala*, see also the *Hizōki*, attributed to Kūkai.

70 *Shiju mandara gi*, p. 251. Interestingly, Kūkai does not mention wood or other materials.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

72 *Ibid.*

73 *Dari jing* 大日經, T. vol. 18, no. 948, p. 44a.

mandara. In this way, the modalities of manifestation and the activities of the Buddha in his absolute form (Dharmakāya) are all reduced to a specific model, the *maṇḍala*.

The four mandalas, then, are mutually interpenetrated: each of them contains the other three.[74] In this respect, it is particularly important to notice the abolition of the distinctions between the sentient and the nonsentient.[75] All objects in the environment, usually considered inanimate, are organized as one of the four mandalas (specifically, the *sanmaya maṇḍala*), which is interpenetrated with, and essentially undifferentiated from, all the others. As such, objects are an important part of the Dharmakāya; since they participate in its enlightened nature, they must have a "mind," and must therefore be essentially animated. This is evident in the fact that ritual implements and emblems representing the deities in the *maṇḍala* are not mere objects associated by metonymy with their respective holders, but material embodiments of the essential nature of those deities.

The mandalization of reality and the interrelation between sentient and nonsentient beings also appear in a text that had an enormous influence on the medieval *kenmitsu* world view, the *Ha jigoku giki* 破地獄儀 (Ritual Instructions on the Destruction of Hell) as it was commonly known in Japan. In the following passage it relates objects and beings to a set of five mantric syllables, which correspond in turn to a number of five-element series synthetically represented by a five-unit *stūpa* (*gorintō* 五輪塔):

> 山海大地。從阿字出。江河流從　字出。金玉珍寶日月星辰火珠光明從藍字成。五穀菓衆花開敷因含字結也。界香美人天長養顔色滋味端正相貌。福徳富貴從欠字莊嚴。

> The mountains, the sea, and the earth come from the letter A. The rivers and all the water streams come from the syllable *vaṃ*. Gold, jade, precious gems, the sun, the moon and the stars, and the light of fire and jewels come from the syllable *raṃ*. The five cereals, the five fruits, and the blossoming flowers are produced by the syllable *haṃ*. Beautiful people perfumed with wonderful fragrances, heavenly longevity, a pretty face, a beautiful aspect, fortune and wealth display their glory out of the syllable *khaṃ*.[76]

[74] *Shiju mandara gi*, pp. 252-253.

[75] *Ibid*., p. 252.

[76] *Ha jigoku giki*, T. 18, no. 905, p. 910b. English translation in Fabio Rambelli, "Tantric Buddhism and Chinese Thought in East Asia," 2000, pp. 373-374.

These ideas were later connected to the question of the possibility that plants could become buddhas. As a direct consequence of Shingon ideas on the original enlightenment of all beings, Kūkai formulated a systematic theory concerning the Buddhahood of the inanimate world, with particular regard to the doctrine of the six elements as the cosmic substance (*rokudai taidai* 六大體大). Since the universe is a modality of existence of the Dharmakāya, all beings that constitute it are buddhas in their essence. However, if the natural world and all nonsentients are ontologically buddhas, the problem is how to understand the true nature of reality. Kūkai and the entire Shingon tradition devote great attention to the epistemological aspects of their soteriology—in the same way in which, as we have seen, epistemological issues also occupy a large part of Tendai *hongaku* treatises.

William LaFleur sees in Kūkai's doctrines an instance of the Japanese specificity in the treatment of the salavation of plants. According to LaFleur, whereas Chinese Buddhist intellectuals such as Daosheng and Zhanran "were superb logicians and interested in pressing their Buddhist universalism to the phenomenal and mundane world as a whole, the Japanese after Kūkai," he writes, "seem to restrict their area of concern to the natural world—in distinction to that which is civilization— rather than the whole of mundane reality. The stress is not so much on the value of the concrete and mundane per se as it is upon the special value—from a Buddhist perspective—that the natural world might have for man."[77]

La Fleur's view presents several problems, however. First, it is based on the traditional topos describing the Chinese and the Japanese as two radically monolithic and opposite entities. While the former are abstract and logical thinkers, the latter are concrete, material, and sentimental, attracted not by abstract speculation but by the concreteness of the natural world. Such an assumption is obviously misleading (to say the least). Moreover, it is not true that "the Japanese after Kūkai seem to restrict their area of concern to the natural world—in distinction to that which is civilization—rather than the whole of mundane reality," as LaFleur writes. On the contrary, the Japanese developed complex systems to explain the totality of their world, including mundane aspects. Furthermore, doctrines on plants becoming buddhas constitute a philosophy of objects, and address precisely the status of phenomena in relation to the absolute, including

77 LaFleur, 1973, p. 97.

the relation between conditioned and unconditioned reality.

In any case, the core of the issue is that the theme of plants is one of the most common subjects of Shingon doctrinal debates, especially within the Kogi school 古義派. Shingon arguments are very different from Tendai ones in their scriptural bases, vocabulary, and imagery.[78] Nevertheless, they apparently share with their Tendai counterparts the main philosophical and ideological concerns. The fundamental problem in Shingon doctrine lies in the assessment of the essentially animate nature of plants and other "inanimate" things. There was the notion that nonsentient beings should be, in their essence, identical to sentient beings, and therefore be endowed with mind and mental faculties. On that basis, one could maintain, in fact, that plants become buddhas as a result of a cognitive decision by an enlightened being. By becoming a buddha one would see the world in a different way, and in particular would be able to discern the enlightened nature of plants.[79] In opposition to this idea, however, Shingon masters were adamant in emphasizing that plants *do* possess consciousness and mental faculties, and, as such, they are able to become buddhas through their own efforts.

The main exegetical strategy in this argument consisted in interpreting the attainment of buddhahood by plants and nonsentients through the doctrine of the three fundamental modalities of the cosmos (*sandai* 三大), substance (*taidai* 體大), appearance (*sōdai* 相大), and activity (*yūdai* 用大). According to this doctrine, everything in the universe (*hokkai*) is made of the six elements (*rokudai* 六大, i.e. earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness). At the same time, all phenomena are originally and innately structured as a *maṇḍala* or, more precisely, as two different mandalic patterns, the Womb *maṇḍala* (Jp. *taizōkai mandara* 胎臧界曼荼羅) and the Vajra *maṇḍala* (Jp. *kongōkai mandara* 金剛界曼荼羅), which manifest themselves in the four different shapes (*shiman* 四曼 or *shiju mandara* 四種曼荼羅) already mentioned. In addition, each phenomenon in the cosmos displays its peculiar activity or function (*yūdai* 用大) as a local,

[78] For a general introduction to the Shingon doctrines of plants' becoming buddhas, see *Mikkyō daijiten* 密教大辞典, 1983, p. 1393; Kamei Sōchū 亀井宗忠, "Shingonshū ni okeru sōmoku jōbutsu ron to sokushin jōbutsu no ninshō ni tsuite" 真言宗における草木成仏論と即身成仏の人証について, 1966.

[79] This position is articulated and criticized in Raihō 頼寶, *Shingon honmo shū* 眞言本母集 3.53-58; In'yū 印融, *Kohitsu shūshū shō* 古筆拾集抄 4.362-363; *Senpo inton shō* 仙保隠遁鈔 1.196-199.

limited instance of the salvational activity of the Buddha Mahāvairocana. This last aspect is known as "the Three Secrets" (*sanmistu* 三密), an expression that refers to the three sources of salvation (bodily postures, speech, mental activity).[80]

The way these ideas apply to plants and nonsentient things in general is discussed in detail by Shingon authors. Concerning the six elements (*rokudai*) as the substance of the universe (*taidai*), they emphasize that the material elements are not just inanimate matter but the symbolic body (*sanmayashin* 三昧耶身) of the Dharmakāya. Therefore, consciousness is present in them as well.[81] This is related to Shingon's distinctive cosmology. In fact, according to a doctrine developed by Jichihan 實範 and Kakuban 覺鑁, the Buddha-body in its absolute form (Dharmakāya) is made up of the six elements and pervades the entire universe (Dharmadhātu).[82] As a consequence, as Raihō 頼寳 (1279-1330?) wrote, "objects (*kikai*) are made of the substance of the Dharmakāya," being then essentially sentient and able to become buddhas by themselves.[83]

Other authors added that the vital principle of all beings, both sentient and nonsentient, is breath (*kisoku* 気息), and its essence the Sanskrit letter A.[84] In this way, Shingon exegetes were able to use their own pneumatology (in turn connected to physiology and soteriology) to justify the animate nature of plants and nonsentient things.[85] Plants and nonsentients have two hearts/minds: the *karidashin* 干栗陀心 (Skt. *hṛdaya*), which is the fleshly, bodily organ, and the *shittashin* 質多心 (Skt. *citta*), the name for mental functions.[86] This

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80 On the doctrine of the three fundamental modalities of the universe (*sandai*) and on the four kinds of *maṇḍala* (*shiju mandara*), see Fabio Rambelli, "Re-inscribing Maṇḍala," 1991.

81 The source of this interpretation is Kūkai, *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*.

82 Jichihan 實範, *Daikyōyōgi shō* 大經要義鈔; Kakuban 覺鑁, *Gorin kujimyō himitsushaku* 五輪九字明秘密釋.

83 Raihō, *Shingon honmo shū* 3.53. Interestingly, Raihō adds that differences in objects "are due to *yin* and *yang* and to the workings of principle (*ri* 理) and wisdom (*chi* 智)" (*ibid.*). A reference to *yin* and *yang* doctrines is also present in the Muromachi period *otogizōshi* 御伽草子 entitled *Tsukumogami ki* 付喪神記 I will discuss below (pp. 60 ff.).

84 See for example Ryūyu 隆瑜, *Hizōki shūyō ki* 秘蔵記拾要記 7.416-417; In'yū, *Kohitsu shūshū shō* 1.279-284.

85 On Shingon pneumatology, see James H. Sanford, "Breath of Life: The Esoteric Nenbutsu," 1994.

86 In'yū, *Senpo inton shō* 1.196-199; see also Ryūyu, *Hizōki shūyō ki* 7.416-417.

means that they also possess the complex apparatus of consciousness that characterizes sentients, indispensable to attaining enlightenment. On this basis, Dōhan 道範 (1178-1252) advances a very interesting theory based on his reading of Kūkai's *Hizōki* 秘藏記 and Annen's *Kyōji gi* 教時義. He identifies the five material elements (earth, water, fire, wind, and space) with the ninth consciousness known as *amala-vijñāna* (*amarashiki* 阿磨羅識). It is the "surface" (*omote*), as he calls it, of nonsentients. Yet, since every surface presupposes a back side (*ura*), the "back side" of nonsentients is the sixth cosmic element, consciousness. According to Dōhan, the ninth consciousness of nonsentients, the pure, undefiled mind, turns into the eighth consciousness, the store consciousness (*ālaya vijñāna* 阿賴耶識). This in turn manifests the seventh (*manashiki* 末那識), which already includes the sixth (*ishiki* 意識). And the sixth consciousness, in Buddhist epistemology and soteriology, is the center of enlightenment. Thus, with his materialistic epistemology and soteriology, Dōhan is able to justify the attribution of a sentient nature to the nonsentients and at the same time to explain their respective differences. He writes that whereas the nonsentients have the material elements on the surface and consciousness on the back side, the sentients have consciousness on the surface and matter on the back side.[87] The argument is similar to the one proposed by the Tendai text *Kankō ruijū*, in which the presence or absence of conscious mind is also described in terms of front (*omote*) and back (*ura*).

Concerning the four mandalas as the semiotic dimension of reality (*sōdai*), Shingon maintains that the *maṇḍala* of symbolic objects (*sanmaya mandara*) encompasses and represents all nonsentient things. The ritual implements (*sanmaya* 三昧耶) in this *maṇḍala* are not mere tools and symbols, but material embodiments of the mental states of the Buddhist deities, vehicles to communicate their various meditative states (*samādhi*) to people.[88] As Raiyu 頼瑜 (1226-1304) wrote, sacred trees are symbolic forms (*sanmayagyō* 三昧耶形) of the Dharmakāya; trees in the garden are the symbolic objects used in the *goma* 護摩 rituals.[89] More specifically, the nonsentients in the *maṇḍala* (lotus flowers, Vajra thunderbolts, swords, and so forth) are the seals of wisdom (*chiin* 智印) of the Dharmakāya, "seal of wisdom" being interpreted as

87 Dōhan 道範, *Hizōki shō* 秘藏記抄, quoted in In'yū, *Kohitsu shūshū shō* 1.281.

88 In'yū, *Kohitsu shūshū shō* 4.362.

89 Raiyu 頼瑜, *Shinzoku zakki mondō shō* 眞俗雑記問答鈔 1.10.

the capacity of discernment that enables a being to choose the path leading to salvation.

In addition, with regard to the universal activity (*yūdai*) constituted by the Three Secrets (*sanmitsu*), Shingon authors tried to show that nonsentients possess this faculty in the same way as sentients do. Raiyu for example wrote that when cherry, plum, or peach trees are moved by the wind they form an esoteric *mudrā*, i.e., the secret of the body (*shinmitsu* 身密), while the sounds of wind, forests, and rivers are in themselves sermons on the sublime Dharma, i.e., the secret of speech (*gomitsu* 語密).[90] He does not mention the secret of the mind (*imitsu* 意密), that is, meditation.[91] But, as Raihō said, the fact that trees preach the Dharma implies that they are sentient and endowed with intelligence. Thoughts, and by extension also the secret of the mind, are thus peculiar not only to humans, but also exist in "birds and beasts"—a term he interestingly employs as a synonym of "plants."[92] Moreover, nonsentients being the symbolic body (*sanmayashin*) of the Dharmakāya suggests that they are always immersed in meditation. As In'yū 印融 (1435-1519) explains, "the seals of wisdom (*chiin*) express wisdom, compassion, meditation, liberation, and so forth, of the deities of the *maṇḍala*."[93] Ryūyu 隆瑜 (1773-1850) writes that this is the reason why plants "do not have to change their essence in order to become buddhas."[94] Previously, Dōhan had maintained that the five material elements—the main constituents of nonsentients—are the five wisdoms (*gochi* 五智) acquired with enlightenment by the five central Buddhas in the *maṇḍala*.[95]

In conclusion, being essentially animate, plants and other material objects are able to become buddhas. They travel by themselves along the route leading to salvation. Shingon doctrines identify four stages in this soteriological journey: arousing the desire for enlightenment (*hosshin*), performance of ascetic and religious practices (*shugyō*),

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90 *Ibid.*

91. According to the Shingon teachings, when one secret is activated, the other two secrets are generated as well: see Kakuban, *Gorin kujimyō himitsushaku*. Kūkai wrote that the Three Secrets of the Dharmakāya are present also in plants and stones: *Unjigi*, 407a.

92 Raihō, *Shingon honmo shū* 3.53-58.

93 In'yū, *Kohitsu shūshū shō* 4.362. See also Raihō, *Shingon honmoshū* 3.53.

94 Ryūyu, *Hizōki shūyō ki* 7.416-417.

95 Dōhan, *Sōmokujōbutsu sō* 草木成佛草, quoted in In'yū, *Kohitsu shūshū shō* 1. 280-281

awakening (*bodai*), and finally *nirvāṇa*, extinction (*nehan*). Following earlier Tendai ideas, these are deemed to be identical with the four phases in the life of sentient beings: birth, growth, degeneration, and death. The model reflects a more developed version of that found in the *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki* discussed above,[96] and appears in a tract of the Kamakura period titled *Gozō mandara waeshaku* 五臓曼荼羅和會釋 (Explanation of the Mandala of the Five Organs of the Body).

In a correlative fashion, this text homologates the life-cycle of sentient beings to the cycles of seasons and directions ruling vegetal life. These cycles are then identified with the Shingon soteriological process, based on the five Buddhas at the center of the *maṇḍala* and their five wisdoms. The following is the diagram proposed in the *Gozō mandara waeshaku*:[97]

Life phases	**Seasons**	**Directions**	**Soteriology**	**Buddhas**
birth	spring	East	desire for enlightenment	Akśobhya
stability	summer	South	practice	Ratnasaṃbhava
alteration	fall	West	enlightenment	Amitābha
death	winter	North	nirvāṇa	Amoghasiddhi

Interestingly, Mahāvairocana is not included, but, given his central role and importance, he can be interpreted as encompassing all elements. In fact, he normally corresponds to a fifth series of items that includes the central period of summer (*doyō* 土用), the geographical center, and the perfection of the *upāya*.

In'yū suggested that "deluded plants" (*mayouru sōmoku* 迷フル草木) do not know that the four seasons are in and of themselves the four phases in the process of salvation, whereas "enlightened plants" (*satoru sōmoku* 悟ル草木) realize (*satoru*) that sowing in the spring, growth in the summer, ripening in the fall, and withering away in winter are the four transformations of the letter A in the Sanskrit alphabet (*a*, *ā*, *aḥ*, *aṃ*), which correspond to the four phases of salvation.[98] Shingon exegetes were well aware of the empirical problems these doctrines implied. They wrote that deluded persons—who live in ordinary, deluded states of mind—cannot

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96 Pp. 15 ff.

97 *Gozō mandara waeshaku*, copy preserved at Kanazawa Bunko 金沢文庫, *kan* 1 and 2. I am grateful to professor Manabe Shunshō 真鍋俊照, the director of the Kanazawa Bunko, for his kind help with this text.

98 In'yū, *Kohitsu shūsh ūshō* 1.283.

see the life-phases of plants as a process of enlightenment. Dōhan compares the state of such people to "an eye underground which cannot see what is on the surface of the earth."[99] What is invisible to the bodily eye of human beings is perfectly clear to the penetrating vision of the "Buddha-eye."[100] Nevertheless, doctrinal problems could easily arise from this perspective—What Buddha teaches the Dharma to the nonsentients? Who are the nonsentients' direct masters? What kind of practices do they perform? In'yū's response to these questions is obscure: he says that, since the realm of nonsentients is quite different from ours, it is difficult to give a clear and detailed answer. He does mention, however, that a text vaguely referred to as "Akśobhya's Ritual Procedures" (*Ashuku giki* 阿閦儀軌) states that plants in the east worship the Buddha Akśobhya.[101]

The Shingon speculations on the possibility for plants and all nonsentients to become buddhas could be interpreted as an expression of the "traditional" Japanese attitude toward nature, one of respect for it, if not of outright veneration, as a consequence of a supposed "animistic spirit" pervading Japanese mentality.[102] However, such an interpretation presents a number of problems, some of which I will address in the next sections of this book. Here I will limit myself to emphasize one point: when asked whether it is a crime to cut a plant or to destroy an object, the response of Shingon masters is negative. They argue that nonsentients are made to be used by sentients. In particular, objects are originally destined to be the support and nourishment of human beings: this is their *raison d'être*.[103] However, the usages discussed by these authors are often explicitly "religious," as in the case of trees cut in order to make statues of the buddha.

In such cases, a tree, that is, a "symbolic" form (*samaya*-body)

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[99] Dōhan, *Sōmokujōbutsu sō*, quoted in In'yū, *Kohitsu shūshū shō* 1.283.

[100] Raiyu, *Shinzoku zakki mondō shō* 1.26-29; see also Kūkai, *Hizōki*; In'yū, *Kohitsu shūshū shō* 1.283.

[101] In'yū, *Senpo inton shō* 1.198. The title "Akśobhya's Ritual Procedures" refers perhaps to the *Achu rulai niansong gongyang fa* 阿閦如来念誦供養法, transl. by Bukong (T. vol. 19 no. 921), but I have not been able to find the passage mentioned by In'yū in it.

[102] For an overview, and a critique, of this Orientalist stereotype, see Arne Kalland and Pamela J. Asquith, "Japanese Perceptions of Nature: Ideals and Illusions," 1997.

[103] See In'yū, *Kohitsu shūshūshō* 4.363. See also Dōhan, *Sōmoku jōbutsu sō*, quoted in *ibid.* 1.280-283

of the buddha, is cut to be transformed into an icon, which is part of the *karma maṇḍala*. As is well known, Buddhist statues are animated icons, considered to be living presences of the buddhas on earth, and special rituals, known as *kaigen kuyō* 開眼供養 ("ceremony for the opening of the eyes") were (and still are) performed in order to infuse them with life.[104] Interestingly, one of the secret "seals" (combinations of mantras and mudras) performed on such occasions by Shingon monks was the "Seal of Nonsentients and Plants Becoming Buddhas" (*hijō sōmoku jōbutsu no in* 非情草木成佛ノ印).[105] It is possible that this formula has some relation with the memorial monuments for cut trees found in north-eastern Japan. Kimura Hiroshi 木村博 mentions the existence in Yamagata prefecture—and, to a lesser extent, also in Fukushima prefecture—of numerous funerary stones, known as *sōmoku kuyōtō* 草木供養塔 (literally, "memorial stūpas for plants") or *sōmokutō* 草木塔 ("stūpas for plants"), erected to commemorate trees. The earliest examples date back to the mid-Edo period, bust most were erected during the Meiji era (1868-1912). Only a few are more recent (early Shōwa), suggesting that the practice is not widespread today. These stūpas are built according to a template first indicated in the *Ha jigoku giki* mentioned above. Some bear the inscription "plants and the territory all become buddhas" (*sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu*), a clear reference to the medieval Buddhist doctrines I have discussed so far.[106]

The folkloric practice to build funeral monuments to logged trees, then, bears some connections to scholarly theories on the salavation of plants. This raises the question of the relations between elite Buddhist discourse and popular practices—or, in other words, between ecosophia/ecognosis and ecopietas, as we will see in the next chapter.

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[104] On the "eye-opening ceremony" (*kaigen kuyō*) see Michel Strickmann, *Mantras et mandarins. Le bouddhisme tantrique en Chine*, 1996, especially pp. 165-211.

[105] The formula is: *vaṃ hūṃ trāḥ hrīḥ a ā aṃ aḥ āṃ*. See Shinkaku 心覺, *Gashushō* 鵝珠鈔 final fasc. n. 2, p. 319. On the use of this formula see also Shōshin 性心, *Yugikyō hiyōketsu* 瑜祇經秘要決 2.185.

[106] Kimura Hiroshi also mentions the presence throughout Japan of sacred trees, of legends about animated trees, and of religious rituals performed by tree cutters: Kimura Hiroshi, "Dōshokubutsu kuyō no shūzoku" 動植物供養の習俗, 1988, p. 386.

CHAPTER 2

ECOPIETAS: THE DISCOURSE OF THE NONSENTIENTS AND ITS CULTURAL RAMIFICATIONS

The Domain of Ecopietas

In addition to scholarly discussions about the ontological and soteriologic status of vegetal and inanimate objects in general—discussions I have characterized as ecosophia and ecognosis—there was another discursive level on which these issues were addressed: ecopietas. To the domain of ecopietas belong non-philosophical and extradoctrinal texts about the divine nature of trees and their wondrous powers. These texts were either part of the folklore used by members of religious institutions in their teaching and preaching activities, or adaptations of elite doctrines used in narrations, performances, and poems.

In most cases, the latter seem to have been largely influenced by Tendai doctrines on plants becoming buddhas, and especially by the chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* on the "Parable of Medicinal Herbs."[1] A famous example is the Nō 能 play *Bashō* 芭蕉 (The Plantain Tree). The spirit of a plaintain tree, attracted by the reading of the *Lotus Sūtra* by an itinerant monk, manifests itself as a young woman. The play states that even nonsentient entities, as manifestations of the principle that "all dharmas are endowed with the true aspect [of reality]" (*shohō jissō* 諸法實相), have Buddha-nature and therefore become buddhas.[2] It should be noted, however, that this Nō play does not mention vegetal Buddhahood, but simply the uniform and non-discriminating nature of the Dharma preached by the Buddha. In another Nō play, *Kakitsubata* 杜若 (The Iris), the female protagonist reveals herself to be the "spirit of an iris flower" (*kakitsubata no sei* 杜若の精). She says that the author of the *Ise monogatari*, Ariwara no Narihira, was actually a

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1 *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, *juan* 3, ch. 5 "Yaocao yu pin" 藥早喻品, pp. 19-20.

2 *Bashō* 芭蕉, attributed to Konparu Zenchiku 金春禅竹 (1405-around 1470), p. 38.

bodhisattva who appeared in Japan and wrote poems in order to save sentient beings. However, even inanimate entities such as herself, by hearing those poems, can become buddhas. In this Nō there are no doctrinal explanations, just mention of Buddhist terms such as *hongaku* or *shinnyo*, and the expression "plants and the territory all become buddhas."[3]

Texts also frequently cite an apocrphal passage from the *Zhongyin jing* (Jp. *Chūingyō*), known in many variants. I already presented one of these in the section on Annen above.[4] Another version runs as follows: "When a buddha attains enlightenment and looks at the Dharmadhātu, [he sees that] plants and the territory all become buddhas, sentient and nonsentients alike become buddhas and offer religious guidance." This sentence appears, for example, in the Nō play *Nue* 鵺.[5] Buddhist literature in fact contained several tales related to the animated nature of plants, such as flowers opening their petals at night after listening to a poem composed by Chinese Empress Wu 武 (Wu Zhao 武照, d. 705), pine needles turning west indicating the way to India to Xuanzang 玄奘, or a tree in Pataliputra in India which turned into a human being.[6] The Sōtō 曹洞 Zen patriarch Keizan Jōkin also wrote in his autobiography that he attained arhatship in a previous life as a tree spirit.[7]

Besides this textual tradition, numerous practices developed in medieval Japan dealing with inanimate objects, and trees in particular. Tree cutters (*kikori* 樵夫) engaged in ritual activities before and after felling a tree,[8] and so did carpenters (*daiku* 大工, *banshō* 番匠),[9] indicating the existence of a sacred presence in it.

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3 *Kakitsubata*, attributed to Konparu Zenchiku.

4 P. 14.

5 *Nue* 鵺, attributed to Zeami 世阿弥 (1364?-1443), p. 309. *Nue* is a mythological bird said to appear at night.

6 See Hirota Tetsumichi 広田哲通, *Chūsei bukkyō setsuwa no kenkyū* 中世仏教説話の研究, 1987, esp. p. 388.

7 See below p. 81.

8 On the tree cutters ritual' in Akita prefecture, see Shidei Tsunahide 四手井綱英, *Shinrin* 森林, 1985, esp. p. 134; on analogous rituals in the Suwa area in central Japan, see Miyaji Naokazu 宮地直一, *Suwa jinja no kenkyū, ge* 諏訪神社の研究（下）, 1985 (original edition 1937), in particular pp. 212-213.

9 An example of a carpenter's prayer (*norito* 祝詞) is given by Nishioka Tsunekazu 西岡常一: the carpenter prays that the spirit of the tree will be reborn in the new building for which the tree will be used. Nishioka insists, in fact, that a

The same is true for sculptors of Buddha images (*busshi* 佛師). In this case, ritualization was carried out in order to "sacralize" the object and overcome separation between secular matter and the sacred spirit that was supposed to inhabit it.[10] Furthemore, in the late medieval period memorial services (*kuyō* 供養) for specific objects developed—a practice still very popular today that has developed into "funerals" for needles, dolls, talismans, professional tools, and so forth.[11]

In this chapter I will explore some of the cultural ramifications of Japanese doctrines concerning the status and role of the nonsentients by focusing on the antagonistic relationships between Buddhist and "Shintō" institutions, and the attempt by Buddhist institutions to secure social and economic control for themselves.

Trees, Kami, and Buddhism

William LaFleur has suggested that Buddhist doctrines on plants becoming buddhas were related to pre-Buddhist Japanese ideas according to which nature was "a locus of soteriological value." LaFleur explains:

> Chūjin's theories, in particular, made it possible from within a Buddhist context to view natural phenomena as already enlightened; this meant that in some sense at least things within nature could be seen as buddhas and, therefore, as approximate equivalents—although within another vocabulary—of *kami*.[12]

In other words, according to LaFleur the *Kankō ruijū* had a significant role in Shintō-Buddhist syncretism by reformulating pre-Buddhist concepts of nature and of *kami* in a Buddhist way.

In reality, the relations between Buddhist doctrines on the salvation of plants and the Shintō tradition are not clear. It is

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tree lives twice: the first time in the natural state as a tree, and the second time in the structure the tree has been used to build. Nishioka Tsunekazu and Kohara Jirō 小原二郎, *Hōryūji wo sasaeta ki* 法隆寺を支えた木, 1978 (1999), esp. p. 53.

[10] On rituals related to the production of a Buddha image, see Strickmann, 1996, esp. pp. 165-211; see also Fabio Rambelli, "Secret Buddhas (*Hibutsu*), or the Limits of Buddhist Representation," (forthcoming d).

[11] On memorial rites for objects, see Fabio Rambelli, "Objects, Rituals, Tradition: A Genealogy of Memorial Services (*Kuyō*) for Objects in Japan," 1998.

[12] LaFleur, 1973, p. 111.

possible that medieval Buddhist authors were trying to reformulate pre-existing folk ideas in order to make Buddhism more directly relevant to, and in tune with, popular conceptions. However, it is doubtful that such popular conceptions can be reduced to an underlying and unchanging layer of "Shintō" beliefs as many scholars propose. In addition, Buddhist ecognosis never refers in any explicit way to pre-Buddhist folk ideas. This is an important fact to underscore, given that these texts were written by people deeply steeped in *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 religiosity, which conceived of local deities (*kami*, *myōjin* 明神) as manifestations of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other figures of the Buddhist pantheon.[13] Although it was normal practice for the authors to interpret Japanese myths and ancient legends in terms of Indian and Buddhist mythology, they never did that when they addressed the doctrines on the Buddhahood of plants.

Ancient Japanese texts contain many references to trees in a religious context. Trees (or, at least, some trees) were described as abodes of the *kami*, or as deities themselves.[14] Matsuoka Seigō 松岡正剛 has noted that the *kami* manifested themselves in the trees and forests as sound.[15] The trees were thus treated as receivers of messages and beings from the world of the deities. The receptacles of the *kami* (*yorishiro* 寄り代) were often sacred trees, called *shinboku* 神木 or *himorogi* ひもろぎ.[16] In this respect, it is important to underline that trees were considered sacred as abodes of the *kami*, and very rarely as *kami* themselves. The *Kōtai jingū gishiki chō* 皇太神宮儀式帳, a document of the ninth century, lists the materials of the "bodies of the *kami*" (*goshintai* 御神體) in the main shrines of Japan at the time. Among them, twenty-seven were stones, five were mirrors, and one was water. Interestingly,

13 On *honji suijaku* see for example Murayama Shūichi 村山修一, *Honji suijaku* 本地垂迹, 1974; Allan G. Grapard, *The Protocol of the Gods*, 1992; John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, eds., *Shintō in History*, 2000; Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli, eds., *Buddhas and Kami in Japan* (forthcoming).

14 Modern authors keep an ambiguous position on whether *kami* were believed to be present in all trees in Japan or only in some of them. For an example of this attitude, see Shidei, 1985, p. 134.

15 In this respect it is perhaps significant that "echo" is called in Japanese *kodama* 木霊, written with characters meaning the "spirit of trees."

16 Matsuoka Seigō 松岡正剛, *Kachōfūgetsu no kagaku* 花鳥風月の科学, 1994: pp. 76-83.

sixteen shrines in the list had no body of the *kami*.[17]

At this point, a discussion of the material form of the *kami*, in particular trees, is in order. In most modern books on Shintō there is a fundamental ambiguity concerning the body of the *kami*: *kami* are described alternatively as material objects such as stones and trees, or as immaterial entities abiding more or less temporarily in those material objects. Kageyama Haruki 景山春樹 is the scholar who studied the shape of the *kami* most extensively, but his interpretations are not without problems. According to Kageyama, the *kami* were originally "symbolic, formless beings" abiding in certain rocks (*iwakura* 磐座) and trees (*himorogi, shinboku*). For Kageyama this animistic attitude constitutes the primordial form of Shintō, what he calls "natural Shintō" (*shizen shintō* 自然神道).[18] Later, under the influence of Buddhism, *kami* turned into "beings endowed with forms and images,"[19] Shintō even became a sort of "idolatry" (*gūzō sūhai* 偶像崇拝) when human forms were attributed to the deities.[20]

Here we cannot help but notice the two major assumptions grounding Kageyama's interpretation: the belief in the existence of a "natural religion" spontaneously arising among primitive people and targeting natural objects, and the idea that Shintō has always been a uniform entity that can easily be defined by a few formulas. Furthermore, Kageyama believes that there existed in "primordial Shintō" a primary distinction between spirit and form (*kokoro to katachi* こころとかたち). However, this distinction became possible only after the arrival to Japan of Buddhism with its practice of building religious images as embodiments of the sacred. Kageyama writes that in the case of *honji suijaku* representations, their "form is that of a buddha-image, but their spirit is a sacred tree" (形像は仏像であるが、その本体は神木である).[21] In this sentence, the term "spirit," glossed by Kageyama in *hiragana* as *kokoro*, is written by the characters for *hontai*, which indicate not a spiritual entity but the very substance out of which the image is made. This fundamental confusion mars Kageyama's argument. Are *kami* formless or do they have a material

[17] Quoted in Matsuoka, 1994, p. 84.

[18] Kageyama Haruki 景山春樹, *Shinzō* 神像, 1978, p. 17.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

form? Actually, there seems to be a distinction between a *kami* whose "body" is a certain rock or tree, and formless *kami* who abide temporarily in specific material supports (*yorishiro*). In other words, a particular sacred tree can be envisioned either as the *kami* itself or as a material support for the *kami*'s presence. In this sense, representations of *kami* were not intrinsically different from buddha images in general. A statue of a buddha was envisioned not just as a mere "symbol" of an abstract and formless Buddha-nature, but rather as a real presence of Buddha-nature in this world.

In my own view, sacred trees functioning as material supports of *honji suijaku* representations were not the *spirit* of the buddha images, but literally their *material*. This is particularly evident in the case of buddha images sculpted directly in living trees—or in any case clearly displaying the raw tree material out of which they are made—known as *tachigibutsu* 立木仏 or *natabori* 鉈彫. This peculiar form of Buddhist sculpture began in the Heian period among mountain ascetics, but the most famous images were made by Enkū 圓空 (1632-1695) in the seventeenth century.[22] Japanese Buddhism associated certain local deities with buddhas and bodhisattvas (*honji suijaku* doctrines and practices), and expressed this principle also at the level of the material employed for their representations. Thus, sacred trees from the territory owned by the *kami* protecting a Buddhist temple (that is, *himorogi* or *shinboku*) were used to make buddha-images that were envisioned as real presences of the Buddha in this world. As a sacred tree turned into a buddha-image, the *kami* that was supposed to abide in the tree also became a buddha. However, Buddhist exegetes stressed that buddha-images were not mere simulacra, receptacles of the sacred, but presences—animated icons, living Buddhas—in an attempt to eliminate any distinction between material and spiritual.[23] As the sculptor of buddha-images Matsushita Hōrin 松下瑚琳 said, "Buddha is already inside the tree. I simply help to show the shape of Buddha's heart."[24] In the same way, premodern Buddhist

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[22] On Enkū 圓空's life and production, see Gorai Shigeru 五来重, *Enkū to Mokujiki* 円空と目喰, 1997, esp. pp. 21-164; Jan van Alphen, ed., *Enkū 1632-1695. Timlesse Images from 17th Century Japan*, 1999. The description of Enkū's works (pp. 100-192) is by Robert Duquenne.

[23] On this subject, see Rambelli, (forthcoming d); Bernard Faure, "The Buddhist Icon and the Modern Gaze," 1998; Robert H. Sharf, "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics," 1999.

[24] Quoted in Kageyama, 1978, p. 45.

exegetes and sculptors wanted to turn *kami* into buddhas, not buddhas into *kami*—an operation attempted instead by some medieval Shintō theorists.[25] In short, it appears that the spirit/matter distinction developed with the production of sacred images under the influence of Buddhism, and it is therefore not an original Japanese concern regarding the primordial status of the *kami*. Furthermore, as we have seen, such an ontological distinction could be reformulated as dealing either with the primacy of buddhas or of the *kami*—primacy that also had political implications. It is not surprising, then, that issues of representation were particularly important among doctrinal discussions in premodern Japan, since they concerned not only the status of the sacred and its manifestations, but also the role of the religious institutions that controlled them.

The manifestation of the sacred was related to the capacity to interpret the universe and foresee events. Often, trees also functioned as vehicles for omens from the invisible world of the deities. The supernatural vocabulary with which trees announced to humans their messages from the invisible included strange shapes, strong vital signs, and examples of destruction. For example, when trees located in the sacred precincts of a temple or shrine grew mysteriously quickly, showed a peculiar shape, or died (by falling to the ground, withering, or catching on fire), divination was performed to ascertain the meaning of the event. A typical phenomenon—quite common among cedars (*sugi* 杉)—was the so-called *renri* 連理 ("intertwining"), in which trunks or branches of neighboring trees intertwined. This phenomenon, considered auspicious by Onmyōdō 陰陽道 doctrines, was reported several times, beginning with the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀.[26] Such aberrations were also sometimes interpreted as negative omens indicating the possibility of serious disasters in the human and natural realms (diseases, natural calamities, war, and the death of important

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25 For example, Watarai Tsuneyoshi 度会常昌 (1263-1339) wrote in the *Daijingū ryōgū no onkoto* 大神宮両宮之御事: "Mahāvairocana has a soul (*tamashii*)... This *kami* [of Ise] is Mahāvairocana's spirit (*rei* 靈)" (*Watarai Shintō taisei* 度会神道大成 p. 467). See also Kuroda Toshio, "The Discourse on the 'Land of Kami' (*Shinkoku*) in Medieval Japan," p. 361.

26 The use of intertwining trees for divination purposes was of Chinese origin. For an example of its political usage see Antonino Forte, *Political Propaganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century*, 1976, p. 237 notes 276, 277.

people).[27] Murayama Shūichi notes that omens in general, and arboreal ones in particular, increased dramatically during the Heian period, perhaps due to the growing influence of Onmyōdō.[28] This fact is very interesting because it indicates that many elements of popular discourses on the sacredness of trees might not date back to a primordial time as an originally Japanese phenomenon, as many authors believe. On the contrary, pre-medieval ideas on the sacredness of trees were often borrowings from Chinese and other continental cultures that were subsequently adapted to native perspectives.

In addition to their uses in divination, trees—or parts of trees such as branches and leaves—often functioned as mediators with the realm of the deities. As noted by Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫, the *sakaki* 榊 tree is used in the flower festival (Hana matsuri 花祭り) of Oku Mikawa 奥三河 to facilitate communication between human beings and deities and between deities and ghosts. Here demons (*oni* 鬼) begin to talk when they are beaten with *sakaki* branches.[29] This ritual echoes a famous scene in the *Nihon shoki*, when Amaterasu 天照 had hidden in a cavern. The gods planted a *sakaki* tree and hung several ritual objects on it; Ame no koyane no mikoto 天児屋根命 and Futodama no mikoto 太玉命 prayed, and Ame no uzume no mikoto 天鈿女命 put *sakaki* branches on her head as a wig, entering into a trance (*kamigakari* 神懸かり). At that point Amaterasu moved the rock that sealed the entrance to the cavern to look at the commotion outside, and light returned to the world.[30] The *sakaki* tree is also used to make ritual implements for *kami* worship: it is one of the objects in which the *kami* descends (*yorishiro*) and at the same time one of the offerings to the *kami*. Particularly famous is the sacred tree (*goshinboku* 御神木) of Kasuga shrine 春日大社, used in medieval Japan by the Kasuga *jinin* 神人 militias during their demonstrations (*gōso* 強訴).[31] Orikuchi wrote that the spirit of the *kami* of Kasuga is nothing

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27 For some examples, see Sasamoto Shōji 笹本正治, *Chūsei no saigai yochō: Ano yo kara no messeeji* 中世の災害予兆－あの世からのメッセージ, 1996, esp. pp. 85-89, 142-147.

28 Murayama Shūichi, *Henbō suru kami to hotoketachi* 変貌する神と仏たち, 1990, p. 196.

29 Quoted in Murayama, 1990, p. 189.

30 *Nihon shoki,* vol. 1, p. 112; see also *Kojiki*, pp. 51-53.

31 On Kasuga's sacred tree, see Seta Katsuya 瀬田勝哉, ed., *Ki no kataru chūsei* 「木」の語る中世, 1995, pp. 18-22.

other than the spirit of the *sakaki* tree. Yet, as Murayama Shūichi argues, this idea probably arose only after the primitive concept of *sakaki* was used to refer to a particular kind of tree (previously, *sakaki* does not seem to refer to any specific tree, but to trees endowed with sacred functions in general). Subsequently, with the formation of social structures controlling mountain forests, myths concerning the divine creation of trees developed.[32] In the *Nihon shoki* the god of trees is called Kukunochi 句句迺馳, a word that was probably used to refer to the *sakaki* tree. The text also tells of Itsutakeru no mikoto 五十猛命, who descended from heaven in the land of Kii 紀伊國, and sowed the seeds of trees in the Great Land of Eight Provinces (Ōyashima no kuni 大八州國, an expression referring to the Japanese archipelago) turning it into a verdant mountain. The trees, however, were created by Itsutakeru's father, the ambiguous and dangerous Susanoo no mikoto 素戔鳴尊. According to the myth, Susanoo's beard became cedars (*sugi*), the hair of his chest became cypress (*hinoki* 檜), his eyebrows became camphor trees (*kusu* 樟), and the hair from his buttocks became black pines (*maki* 槇). Susanoo further decided the uses of these trees: cedars and camphor wood were destined to build boats, cypress were to be used to build the king's residence, and black pines were for coffins. Susanoo's children, Itsutakeru, Ōyatsuhime no mikoto 大屋都姫命, and Tsumatsume no mikoto 抓津姫命, sowed the seeds of trees and were worshipped in the land of Kii.[33] In the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, legends concerning tree deities are almost exclusively from the land of Kii, perhaps because, as Murayama suggests, that vast forest region was close to the center of Yamato 大和 power.[34] In any case, the land of Kii became the paradigmatic land of trees. The central deity of the main shrine (*hongū* 本宮) in the Kumano 熊野 complex, Ketsumiko no kami 家津御子神, is an arboreal deity. Its name literally means "god son of trees" (*ketsu* is an ancient genitive form of *ki*, "tree"), although it is not clear what kind of tree-god this deity is.[35]

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[32] Murayama, 1990, pp. 190-191.

[33] Their three shrines are still present today in Wakayama city.

[34] Other regions of Japan were also called the "land of trees." Such is the case of the "land of the divine tree" (*mike no kuni*) in Tsukushi (present day Kyūshū), called in this way by emperor Keikō 景仰 because of a giant tree located there. See Sakamoto Tarō 坂本太郎 *et al.*, eds., *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 vol. 1, pp. 295-296.

[35] Murayama suggests it could be the *nagi* 梛, a type of evergreen tree sacred in

These myths and ritual practices do not tell the whole story about the role of trees and nature in general according to the mentalities of the ancient inhabitants of Japan. In pre-Buddhist mythological accounts nature was often presented as a negative entity, the realm of hostile and uncontrollable powers. The *Hitachi fudoki* 常陸風土記, for example, describes the original condition of the world as chaos, lack of order. The world was dominated by violent deities (*araburu-gami* 荒ぶる神), and the main sign of chaos was the fact that "rocks and trees and the grass could speak."[36] Such an abnormal condition ceased only with the imposition of cultural order that tamed violent deities and brought the vegetal world under control.[37] Ancient stories about giant trees are also manifestations of this attitude. For example, a well known legend says that in Ōmi province there was a giant tree so tall that its shadow covered Tanba province in the morning and Ise province in the evening. Farmers were annoyed because its continuous shadow hindered the develompent of agriculture. They asked the emperor for help, and the emperor authorized the felling of the tree; as a consequence, the land finally became fertile.[38] In this respect, it is worth noting that until the early Meiji period big trees were considered a nuisance and were logged in order to clear land for agriculture. In fact, ancient texts often describe giant trees as "enemies of the sovereign," or in general as causes of disease and disorder. Their felling, under the ruler's authorization, amounted to an act of cosmic and social ordering by the ancient Yamato state. Interestingly, such acts of ordering also involved the appropriation of local deities by Yamato powers and, at the same time, a process of desacralization.[39]

Whereas ancient texts emphasize the negative aspects of nature, Buddhist doctrines on inanimate objects stress the

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the area. Murayama, 1990, pp. 191-192.

36 *Hitachi fudoki* 常陸風土記, in Yoshino Yutaka 吉野裕, ed., *Fudoki* 風土記, 1969 (1972), p. 19.

37 See Yamaguchi Masao, "Nature and Culture in the *Fudoki*," 1999.

38 *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集 31, no. 37, in Yamada Yoshio 山田孝雄 et al., eds., *Konjaku monogatari shū* vol. 5, 1963 (1965), pp. 306-307. Similar stories appear in a surviving fragment (逸文) from *Chikugo no kuni fudoki* 筑後国風土記, in Yoshino Yutaka, ed., 1969, pp. 340-341; and in the *Kojiki*, in. Kurano Kenji 倉野憲司 and Takeda Yūkichi 武田祐吉, eds., *Kojiki, Norito* 古事記・祝詞, 1958 (1966), p. 283.

39 On this subject see Kawamura Minato 川村湊, *Oto wa maboroshi* 音は幻, 1987, pp. 134-155 (esp. pp. 141-148).

absolute, and therefore positive, value of natural phenomena as part of absolute reality, be it conceived of as Thusness (Sk. *tathātā*, Jp. *shinnyo*) in the case of the Tendai school, or as the absolute Buddha-body (Dharmakāya, Jp. *hosshin*) in the case of Shingon. According to these doctrines, natural entities do speak, but they do so in order to preach the True Dharma. I do not know whether Shingon and Tendai exegetes had read the *Fudoki*, but it is obvious that Buddhist doctrines on plants becoming buddhas (and the related conceptions about nature and the inanimate world) were not a reformulation in Buddhist terms of pre-existing Shintō beliefs. On the contrary, they constituted a radical departure from pre-Buddhist ideas and practices. The chaotic world in which plants speak, described in the *Fudoki*, turned out to be the absolute and unconditioned Reality of enlightenment, in which plants spoke the absolute Dharma.[40]

Furthermore, whereas traditional local cults only recognized the sacredness of specific natural objects, esoteric Buddhism—as we have seen—emphasized the holiness (potentially, at least) of the entire universe as the sublime but material body of the cosmic Buddha. In fact, the idea that everything is a *kami* appears to have developed in medieval Japan within *honji suijaku*, and specifically *ryōbu shintō* texts. For example, the *Ryōgu honzei rishu makaen* 両部本誓理趣摩訶衍 (The Mahāyāna of the Principles of the Original Pledge of the Two [Shrines of Ise]) explicitly says that "all grass and roots are *kami*," but it grounds that statement on the esoteric features of the Sanskrit syllable A.[41]

The conceptual transformation of nature and inanimate objects in general that I have discussed so far was not unrelated to underlying struggles between Buddhist religious institutions and local ("Shintō") ceremonial centers—struggles that in turn reflected antagonisms between central state institutions and local organizations. With the expansion of state and individual support

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40 In Buddhist literature there were also some ambiguous cases. For example, the *Tsurezuregusa* 徒然草 by Urabe Kenkō 卜部兼好 reports that Shosha Shōnin 書寫上人 (Shōkū 性空, ?-1007) had the miraculous power to hear the laments of beans being boiled (*Tsurezuregusa*, *kan* 1 no. 69, pp. 146-147; English translation in Donald Keene, ed., *Essays in Idleness*, 1967, p. 62). This story probably emphasizes Shosha Shōnin's spiritual power and Buddhist compassion towards all things, but does not indicate any remedy to stop the beans' suffering.

41 *Ryōbu honzei rishu makaen* , *chū*, p. 235. On this text see Kadoya Atsushi 門屋温, "*Ryōbu honzei rishu makaen* kō" 両部本誓理趣摩訶衍考, 1992.

to Buddhist institutions, there was a dramatic increase in the number of temples and Buddhist halls throughout Japan. The increasing complexity of the new state administration also required new buildings. The construction of these edifices, and of relevant icons, ritual implements, etc., required an enormous amount of building material—mostly wood. More importantly, the construction of Buddhist temples as symbols of the new state's power (and, more generally, of central institutions and culture), generated tension in the provinces by threatening local autonomy, traditional customs, and social order. It is in this context of cultural change that we must interpret ancient and medieval legends about trees.

Buddhism followed the same pattern that the Yamato rulers had used to establish their hegemony as described in ancient records. Buddhism desacralized local religious symbols and then appropriated them as Buddhist entities. Trees played an essential role in this process. In many cases, miraculous stories about trees are related to the construction of temples and buddha images. Legends on the first Buddhist statues made in Japan tell us that these statues were made out of a camphor tree that had come flowing over the sea emitting light and music.[42] Camphor wood, originally created by Susanoo no mikoto, was used to build boats and *koto*-like musical instruments that were used primarily in divination and as symbols of power.[43] Other stories tell of trees speaking, crying, or producing other miraculous signs—trees also used as materials for Buddhist statues.[44]

A common topos in medieval narratives involves deities who appear in dreams to holy men and indicate particular trees to be used as materials for sculptures. These trees were usually considered "sacred" because of their peculiar shape, their old age, or because of strange phenomena believed to occur near them, such as the sound of voices or the appearance of strange light. For example, one day a priest appeared in a dream to the

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[42] This is the origin of two buddhist images later placed in the Yoshinodera 吉野寺 as told in the *Nihon shoki* in an entry for the year 553. See Sakamoto Tarō 坂本太郎 *et al.*, eds., *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 vol. 2, 1967, pp. 103-104. A variant of this tale appears in the *Nihon genpō zen'aku ryōiki* 日本現報善悪霊異記 (Endō Yoshiki 遠藤嘉基 and Kasuga Kazuo 春日和男, eds., *Nihon ryōiki* 日本霊異記, 1967, pp. 81-88).

[43] See Allan G. Grapard, 1992, pp. 152-155.

[44] See for example *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記, *kan* 2 no. 22, pp. 241-245; no. 23, p. 245; no. 26, pp. 255-257; *kan* 3 no. 17, pp. 363-365.

wandering ascetic Gyōen 行圓 (active 1004-1010; also known as Kawa Shōnin 革上人 because of the animal fur he used to wear), and suggested to him that he use the wood of a very old zelkova tree (*tsuki* 槻) lying on the ground near the Kamo shrine 賀茂神社 to make a Buddhist icon.[45] In 1005, Gyōen used part of the tree to make an image of Kannon, which he placed in the Gyōganji 行願寺 (Kōdō Kannon 革堂観音). Later, Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師 used the remaining wood to make another image, which he placed in the Ryōbuji 良峯寺. The tree itself had been a central element in the origin myths of the deities of the Kamo shrines.[46] In addition, in the complex narrative that describes the shrine's origins, the zelkova tree had grown miraculously out of rice seeds and then became the catalyst for the manifestation of a *kami* in the place in which the shrine (central Kamo) was subsequently built. Later, Buddhism took that tree and used it to make buddha images—that is, animate, real presences of the Buddha in this world. In other words, the development of *honji suijaku* doctrines and practices consisted also in the appropriation of sacred materials, in both senses as raw construction materials and as narrative/mythological elements.

Buddhist texts also contain different descriptions of the relationships among *kami*, trees, and buddha images. For example the *Kōryūji raiyū ki* 廣隆寺來由記, the history of the Kōryūji temple 廣隆寺, tells the following story. The wood of an old, sacred tree was used to make a statue of the Buddha Yakushi 薬師 that was placed in the sanctuary of Mukō Myōjin 向日明神 at Otokuni 乙訓, in Yamashiro Province 山城國. Over time, the statue showed several signs of its miraculous power. During the reign of Emperor Ninmyō 仁明 (810-850), it was enshrined in the Gantokuji 願徳寺 temple in Nishiyama 西山. One day in 864, Emperor Seiwa 清和 (850-880, r. 858-876) became ill. He ordered a certain monk Dōshō 道昌 (n.d.) to move the image from the Gantokuji to the Kōryūji in Uzumasa, and to use it to perform healing rituals. At that point, Mukō Myōjin, the deity of Otokuni district, moved to Uzumasa as well, establishing its abode in a zelkova tree inside the temple precinct. When the *kami* moved into it, the tree at first withered—which is why the shrine built

[45] Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬, *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釋書, 14 "Shaku Gyōen" 釋行圓, pp. 303-304.

[46] See the fragment (*itsubun*) from *Yamashiro no kuni fudoki* 山城国風土記, in Yoshino Yutaka, ed., 1969, pp. 271-272.

there was called Kogare Myōjin-sha 木枯明神社 (*kogare* meaning "withered three")—but it later recovered.[47] In this story, a deity moves to a tree in order to be exposed to Buddhism, and causes temporary damage to that tree. It may be noted in passing that the successful manipulation of Yakushi's sacred image and the related control over the power that accrued to it through its material relationship with *kami* resulted in a successful ecclesiastical career for Dōshō.

The Medieval Tendai encyclopedia *Asabashō* 阿娑縛抄 reports that the trunk of the giant tree in Ōmi Province 近江國 mentioned above,[48] whose shadow extended for several hundred kilometers, was divided into three parts after the tree was cut with imperial authority. The logs were carried away by rivers, and wherever they were stranded an epidemic broke out. Eventually, the emperor ordered that they be used to make three statues of Kannon: one was enshrined in Shigadera 志賀寺 in Ōmi Province and another in the Gōrinji 剛琳寺 in Kawachi Province 河内國. The last one was made into the eleven-headed Kannon of Hasedera 長谷寺 near Nara 奈良.[49] Here again we see the ordering intervention of Buddhism, which eliminated the calamities caused by dangerous local sacred entities. At the same time, Buddhists showed materially (and dramatically) the intrinsic Buddha-nature of such dangerous entities. In our example, a tree endowed with threatening supernatural power is felled. Its remains cause disease but, when turned into icons of Kannon, they show their compassionate and positive force. On a deeper level, it is not difficult to read in the story a narrative of Buddhist conquest of local resources by creating revised and contrasting images of the sacred.

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47 *Kōryūji raiyū ki*, p. 80.

48 P. 50.

49 *Asabashō*, *kan* 200, in T *zuzō* vol. 9, pp. 756-757. In this version, the reason for the felling of the giant tree is that it caused epidemics. See also Seta Katsuya, ed., 1995, p. 58. A more detailed account of the legendary history of Hasedera Kannon appears in the *Sanbōe* 三寶繪, by Minamoto no Tamenori 源為憲 (d. 1011), written in 984, *kan* 3, pp. 189-191. Miraculous stories also exist concerning the ridgepole of the roof of the Sanjūsangendō 三十三間堂temple in Kyōto. The tree used for the ridgepole was described as a manifestation of Kannon (the main deity of the temple), but before it was used as construction material one of its roots penetrated an abandoned skull in the forest causing a terrible headache to the retired emperor. On these narratives see Tanaka Takako 田中貴子, *Butsuzō ga kataru shirarezaru dorama* 仏像が語る知られざるドラマ, 2000, pp. 64-73.

It is possible that local clans responsible for the ceremonial appratus of the ancient regime circulated legends about tree spirit curses as statements against Buddhism and the new state organization. For example, Emperor Kōtoku 孝徳 (596-654) is accused in the *Nihon shoki* of "venerating Buddhism and belittling the *kami*" because he allowed trees to be cut in a local sacred ground. Even though the emperor did not suffer any curses, the strong criticism he received is a clear indication of resistance in court circles to pro-Buddhist policies.[50] A very different fate befell Emperor Saimei 斎明 (594-661). When he cut trees from Asakura 朝倉 shrine in northern Kyūshū 九州 to build a temporary residence during a military campaign against Silla 新羅, the local *kami* became angry and a fire destroyed the palace. The imperial staff was killed by an epidemic, and eventually even the emperor died.[51] Documents also tell of temples that were moved to different locations because of the hostility of the *kami* residing in neighboring shrines. Such was the case of Kudara Ōdera 百済大寺, originally built by Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574-622). When the temple was moved to Tōichi, the *kami* from neighboring Kobe shrine 子部神社 was said to have provoked several fires in the compound until Emperor Tenmu 天武 (d. 686) moved the temple to Takechi 高市 and called it Takechi Daikanji 高市大官寺. This temple was later moved again to Heijōkyō 平城京 (present day Nara) and renamed Daianji 大安寺.[52] It is easy to read in this tale the hostility of local clans towards a temple established by the central government and also closely related to immigrant communities, as the original name of the temple, Kudara Ōdera ("Great temple of Paekche"), suggests.

In general, however, narratives relate Buddhism's success in accomodating and controlling the deities of the lands from which the trees used for temple construction were taken. The following are two typical stories. At the time of the construction of the Gangōji 元興寺 in Asuka 飛鳥, during the reign of Empress Suiko 推古 (554-628), the woodcutter who was cutting an old zelkova tree in the place where the temple was going to be built died. His replacement died as well, and no one wanted to go near the tree

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50 *Nihon shoki*, in Sakamoto Tarō *et al.*, eds., *Nihon shoki* vol. 2, 1965 (1966), p. 268.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 348-350.

52 *Daianji garan engi narabini ruki shizaichō* 大安寺伽藍縁起并流記資財帳, pp. 115-116.

anymore. On a rainy night, a monk who was investigating the matter, wearing the rain hat and clothing of a traveler casually seeking shelter from the rain, hid inside the hollow of the trunk. At midnight, he could hear a voice within lamenting: "Until now I have killed the men who came to cut me one after another, but sooner or later they will succeed." The voice added: "If they encircle me with a linen rope and read Nakatomi's formula (*Nakatomi no saimon* 中臣祭文),[53] and an ascetic puts a black rope around me, they will be able to cut me and there will be nothing I could do—alas!" The monk, rejoicing, reported everything to the court. The court ordered the tree surrounded with a linen rope, rice grains spread all around, offerings brought, and the Nakatomi purification formula read. An ascetic placed a black rope around the tree and cut it. That time, no one died. When the tree fell, five or six birds that looked like pheasants flew out of the branches towards the southern mountains. The emperor, saddened by the fate of the birds, had a shrine built for them which is now located south of the Ryūkaiji 龍海寺 temple.[54]

In this narrative, a monk adopts a ruse in order to glean the secret of the tree, and then uses the secret to cut it down. But the tree was aware that it would not survive, and that the construction of the temple was unavoidable—a recognition of the inevitability of Buddhism's triumph in Japan.[55] What is interesting is that typical "Shintō" liturgical devices (*shimenawa* 注連縄 ropes, Nakatomi's formula, etc.) are used in order to cut a tree for the purpose of establishing a Buddhist temple—a further indication of the complex relationships between Buddhist institutions and local cults.

The second story is even more explicit about this sort of institutional interaction. In 827, an illness of Emperor Junna 淳和 (786-840) was explained through divination as the consequence of a curse by the deity Inari 稲荷 because the trees in its land had been cut for the construction of the Tōji 東寺 temple. The curse

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53 A synonym of *Nakatomi no harae* 中臣の祓え or simply *ōharae* 大祓. This was the sacred formula read during the *ōharae*, an important purification ceremony that took place in the sixth and twelfth months of the year, and was officiated by members of the Nakatomi 中臣 priestly house. For an English translation of the formula, see Donald L. Philippi, *Norito*, 1990, pp. 76-77.

54 *Konjaku monogatari shū* 11 no. 22, in Yamada Yoshio et al., eds., *Konjaku monogatari shū* vol. 3, pp. 100-102.

55 On this tale see also Yamaguchi Masao, "Buddhist Ideology and the Formation of Literary Text in Ancient Japan," 2000, esp. pp. 105-109.

was neutralized in a brilliant way: Inari was made the protector of the Tōji.[56] The temple had now nothing to fear from the local deity, and Inari's shrine was now related to the most important temple of the powerful Shingon sect, such that there would be no shortage of offerings and worship of it.

At this point it should be clear that usual interpretations that take Buddhist doctrines about trees to be a consequence of pre-existing Shintō ideas need to be revised. In fact, it is not unlikely that it was Buddhism that actually gave importance to trees as sacred entities. This was done for two different but related reasons: to sacralize Buddhist statues and sacred places, and to turn *kami* into buddhas (literally and materially as well). In other words, the appropriation of trees as emblems of local deities signified the control of Buddhist institutions over the sacred. The subjugation of local deities by buddhas and bodhisattvas was actively and ritually displayed through the felling of trees taken to be as "sacred." Local ceremonial centers probably used the same rhetoric to assess their role as protectors of the new religious institutions. But the stories cited above also suggest that the *kami*'s reactions to Buddhism were indications of tensions within the religious and political world of the time. Trees were often loci of deeper and more complex cultural issues: they tell us a fragmentary history of struggle and resistance against a centralized power, either political (the emperor) or religious (Buddhist institutions).[57]

Suwa Shrine's Onbashira *Ritual and the Transformation of Nature*

A particularly interesting example of ecopietas concerning trees is the ritual known as *Onbashira* 御柱 ("divine pillar"), which is performed every seven years at Suwa shrine 諏訪大社 in central Japan. This ritual presents analogies with the periodic reconstruction of shrines such as Ise 伊勢, Sumiyoshi 住吉, Kashima 鹿島, and Katori 香取 that take place every twenty years. Records concerning Suwa date back to the early Heian period, when Emperor Kanmu 桓武 (737-806) ordered pillars built for the shrine-temple complex, but the way this ancient event is related to today's ritual is not clear.

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[56] Quoted in Murayama, 1990, pp. 207-208.

[57] On the transgressive, oppositional potential of sacred tree narratives, see also Kawamura, 1987, pp. 151-152.

In the ritual, selected trees are marked with a sacred rope (*shimenawa*) and labeled to indicate their specific function at the shrine. The trees are cut with consecrated tools and following strict ritual procedures over a period of seven days at the beginning of the year in which the rite is performed. After a few months, participants in the ritual take the trees that have thus been felled down from the mountain to the village (the *yamadashi* 山出し phase, now carried out at the upper shrine over three days at the beginning of April), and then up again to the shrine (*satobiki* 里曳き, over three days at the beginning of May).[58] The transportation of the huge trunks is the pretext for a spectacular and dangerous ritual, traditionally led by the tree cutters' guild (*yamatsukuri* 山作り), which is now an important tourist attraction in the area. People sit on the trees while they are thrown down the mountain. The trees are then pulled across a river and up a slope to the village, and from there dragged to the shrine. At that point, the trees are hauled upright with ropes, and the most intrepid participants in the ritual remain standing on the rising trunks for as long as they can. Finally, the trunks are placed at the four corners of the main building of each shrine as powerful markers of the sacrality of the place.[59]

The meaning of this rite is complex, and has changed significantly throughout history. The explanation related today is that the ritual brings to the village the god of the mountain, who is believed to abide in the trees that have been cut. The god bestows its blessing and protection on the tree cutters and the villagers. In this case, the trees are presented, in a simplified Shintō fashion, as mere receptacles (*yorishiro*) of the *kami*. Medieval documents, however, offer a very different, and much richer, picture. A late Muromachi text describes the four pillars as embodiments of bodhisattvas venerated in the area, namely, Fugen 普賢, Monju 文殊, Kannon 觀音, and Miroku 彌勒.[60] Fugen in particular was

58 At the lower shrine these two phases take place a week later than at the upper shrine.

59 On Suwa shrine and the *onbashira* ritual, see for example Kawamura Nozomi 河村望, ed., *Nihon shihonshugi to minkan shintō: Suwa no seishigyō to Suwa Taisha shinkō* 日本資本主義と民間信仰ー諏訪の製糸業と諏訪大社信仰, 1992; Yazaki Takenori 矢崎猛伯, "Suwa" 諏訪, in Tanikawa Ken'ichi 谷川健一, ed., *Mino, Hida, Shinano* 美濃、飛騨、信濃, 1987, pp. 129-171; Miyaji Naokazu, *Suwa jinja no kenkyū* (part two), 1985.

60 Quoted in Miyaji, 1985, p. 217.

the original form (*honji* 本地) of the *kami* venerated at the Jingūji 神宮寺, an important temple complex that controlled the Suwa shrine and was destroyed during the anti-Buddhist persecutions of the early Meiji era.[61] In addition, the *onbashira* pillars were identified with the single-pronged *vajra* (*dokko* 獨鈷), an important ritual implement of esoteric Buddhism that functioned as a destroyer of demons and protector of buddhists.[62]

In premodern times, various explanations were proposed concerning the meaning of the Suwa pillars. Miyaji Naokazu 宮地直一 has offered a systematic summary. The pillars have been interpreted as cosmological markers of the four directions, as protectors against meteorological disasters, as the sublime body of Suwa Myōjin 諏訪明神 (the deity worshipped at the Suwa shrine), as markers of the sacred space of Suwa Myōjin and his shrine, and as offerings to the *kami*.[63] These interpretations are not mutually exclusive: as embodiments of the sacred according to the principles of *honji suijaku* religiosity (principles that have been forgotten today), the pillars were local manifestations of the four protecting bodhisattvas of the region—therefore, they were not just receptacles but living presences. They marked the sacred space of the shrine-temple at the center of its religious landholdings, and ensured protection as well—to the tree cutters (in a sort of Tantric reversal in which the tree extends protection to those who hurt it) and to the villagers at large.

What is particularly interesting to us, however, is an issue that has been largely ignored by scholarship: the semiotic status of the pillars. The space of the *kami*-bodhisattvas is expressed not by purely "natural" trees, but by trees that have been subjected to human labor of various kinds: ceremonial (ritual), semiotic (interpretation), and manual (cutting, transportation, setting, etc.). In other words, the Suwa *onbashira* ritual constitutes a sophisticated intermediary stage in a theory of representation of the sacred, a stage between ancient beliefs in *kami* abodes (*himorogi* and *yorishiro*) and later iconic objects

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61 On Meiji anti-Buddhist policies, see James Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*, 1990. I am grateful to Inoue Takami for sharing with me the results of his ongoing research on anti-Buddhist policies in the Suwa area and the important Buddhist presence there before the Meiji period. See Inoue Takami, "The Interaction between Buddhist and Shinto Traditions at Suwa Shrine," in Teeuwen and Rambelli, eds., forthcoming.

62 Miyaji, 1985, p. 217.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 216-224.

(buddha- and *kami-* images); or, put in a different way, between sacred trees and sacred images. In this sense, the Suwa ritual centering on trees, far from being the manifestation of a simple ancestral belief, puts on stage, as it were, important themes of representation of the sacred as well as issues of power relations and social order in the region in which it takes place. Trees are more than simple sacred objects—they are complex intellectual tools which hold their own place within cultural life.

The Revenge of the Nonsentients

The cultural role of inanimate objects in premodern Japan can also be gauged by other sources. Some of the most systematic treatments of Shingon doctrines about nonsentients becoming buddhas, those written by In'yū, were roughly contemporaneous with the production and circulation of narratives as well as painted scrolls about objects that turned into ghosts to haunt humans. These texts took the form of *otogizōshi* 御伽草子[64] and were commonly known as *Tsukumogami ki* 付喪神記. In this context the conceptual proximity between Shingon elite doctrines and the contents of popular narratives on objects is also striking. When read together, they give us a better picture of the late medieval-early modern Japanese *imaginaire* (in the sense indicated by Jacques Le Goff) about things.[65]

The *Tsukumogami emaki* 付喪神繪巻 (Illustrated Scroll of the Ghosts of Old Objects), also known as *Tsukumogami ki* (Record of the Ghosts of Old Objects) and *Hijō jōbutsu e* 非情成佛繪 (Painting of Nonsentient Beings Becoming Buddhas), is an *otogizōshi* probably composed in 1486.[66] Numerous copies made

[64] The conventional term *otogizōshi* 御伽草子 refers to a heterogeneous corpus of about four hundred short stories mostly written during the Muromachi period (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries). Based on religious stories (*setsuwa* 説話), earlier *monogatari* narratives, and on the materials used by itinerant minstrels for their oral performances, they exist in several forms: illustrated scrolls, illustrated booklets or printed fascicles. See Tokuda Kazuo 徳田和夫, *Otogizōshi kenkyū* お伽草子研究, 1988; Barbara Ruch, "Origins of the Companion Library: An Anthology of Medieval Japānese Stories," 1971.

[65] On the concept of imaginary or imagination (French *imaginaire*) see Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 1988.

[66] For the dating of the *Tsukumogami emaki*, see Tanaka Takako 田中貴子, *Hyakki yagyō no mieru toshi* 百鬼夜行の見える都市, 1994, p. 216.

in the Tokugawa period suggest that it was quite a popular text. It tells the story of a group of abandoned objects that turn into dangerous ghosts and, after being pacified, finally become buddhas. The text warns its readers not to dispose of objects without proper memorial rituals. Without these rituals, the objects would turn into *tsukumogami* 付喪神 after a hundred years, the sort of evil ghosts described in the story.[67]

The *Tsukumogami ki* is essentially a tale of subversion and restoration of the cosmic and social orders. On a cosmic level inanimate objects become animate; things escape human control and "bite back," wreaking havoc in society and threatening the safety of the country. The direct cause of such chaos is the objects' rebellious decision to defy the natural order by learning ways to appropriate cosmic energy and acquire a "soul." However, perhaps because of their cosmic transgression, their soul is not like that of humans bur rather of the nature of a ghost or monster.[68]

But what are these objects rebelling against? As the text clearly states, the objects resent the way in which they have been treated by their humans masters, who have abandoned them without mercy or gratitude after use. Their rebellion is against exploitation, but we could say that what the objects really resent is the effects of commodification. Hanada Kiyoteru 花田清輝 has perceived behind the *Tsukumogami ki* the "momentous development in productivity that occurred during the Muromachi period," which enabled people to replace their objects frequently, in a sort of early form of consumerism.[69] Miyata Noboru 宮田登 also writes that in medieval Kyōto commodities had become easily attainable, and old objects were thrown away without much regret.[70] If this is correct, then, the *Tsukumogami ki* represents a certain anxiety about social changes brought about by economic transformations.

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67 *Tsukumogami ki* 付喪神記, in Yokoyama Shigeru 横山重 and Matsumoto Takanobu 松本隆信, eds., *Muromachi jidai monogatari taisei* 室町時代物語大成 vol. 9, 1981, pp. 417-425. See also Komatsu Kazuhiko 小松和彦, "Tsukumogami" つくも神, 1995, pp. 175-212.

68 The presence and the role of a rhetoric of "ghosts" and "ogres" (*oni* 鬼) in premodern discourses about rebellion is discussed in Komatsu Kazuhiko and Naitō Masatoshi 内藤正敏, *Oni ga tsukutta kuni Nihon* 鬼がつくった国・日本, 1985.

69 Quoted in Komatsu Kazuhiko, *Hyōrei shinkō ron* 憑霊信仰論, 1994, p. 339.

70 Miyata Noboru 宮田登, *Minzokugaku e no shōtai* 民俗学への招待, 1996, p. 134.

The fact that the protagonists of the tale are inanimate objects makes its social critique even more poignant. As we have already seen, according to Buddhist initiatory discourses things look inanimate only to the ordinary eye. Essentially, however, on their obverse side (*ura*), they have a spirit. Accordingly, as possessors of a spirit, they can either do evil or become buddhas. The *Tsukumogami ki* says that the objects' animate nature is based both on a transformation of the material elements to reveal consciousness and on the activities of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽. The Shingon exegetes discussed above[71] present in their texts "deluded" and "enlightened" nonsentients. In the same way, the *Tsukumogami ki* presents in a vivid graphic form the whole process of enlightenment of things, from the original realization of their sentient nature to final Buddhahood. At first, objects, like human beings, lead a deluded, evil life. Their encounter with Shingon Buddhism (an encounter that is violent as in all Buddhist stories involving beings—including "inanimate" objects—that are particularly ignorant and hard to lead to the righteous path) results in conversion and in the arousing the desire for enlightenment (*hosshin*), the performance of religious practices (*shugyō*), and awakening (*bodai*). The final picture in a version of the *Tsukumogami ki* shows the objects in their realized Buddhahood (*jōbutsu*), which is also a form of pacification and, therefore, "extinction" (*nirvāṇa*).

The *Tsukumogami ki* also shows something akin to an innate religious spirit of the objects. As soon as they become aware of their sentient nature, objects form a community and establish a primitive (Shintō-like) religious center and rituals. It is one of these rituals, a procession in the streets of Kyōto, that ultimately triggers their conversion to Buddhism and salvation. After their conversion, the rosary Ichiren 一連 (a monk in the objects' world) becomes the spiritual guide of the community of things and leads them to Buddhahood. The text does not discuss it, but Ichiren as a rosary could certainly be envisioned as a *sanmaya*-form, one of the symbolic shapes of the Dharmakāya,[72] and as the manifestation of a buddha preaching to objects and guiding them to salvation.

Most likely, the *Tsukumogami ki* reflects preextant ideas about the intrisically animate nature of objects, with close references to

[71] P. 37.

[72] See pp. 29-30, and 33-34.

Chinese and/or other sources. However, in the text the ghosts of objects are not just oddities or marginal characters, they are the protagonists. Objects were acquiring a different cultural and symbolic status at the time the text was written, as is clear from the *Tsukumogami ki*'s attempt to apply Shingon philosophical doctrines about the possibility for inanimate objects to become Buddhas (*hijō jōbutsu*) to concrete, everyday situations. Such a transformation of the role of objects was probably related to the impact on Japanese urban society of forms of proto-capitalism and processes of commodification, and the consequent attempt by religious institutions to develop new religious markets through the re-enchantment/de-commodification of things. By sacralizing people's attitudes and behavior toward everyday objects, Buddhist institutions were able to play an even greater role in the daily life of medieval Japan, as we will see in the final section of this book.

Soteriological Implications of Doctrines of Plants' Salvation

Another problem with doctrines concerning vegetal Buddhahood is their place within Buddhist soteriology. The discourse of original enlightenment (*hongaku*) became predominant in Japanese Buddhism from the end of the Heian period (twelfth century), an age of cultural transition. According to Hayami Tasuku 速水侑, *hongaku* doctrines were a response to the widespread contemporary perception that Buddhism was in its final phase (*mappō* 末法).[73] The *kenmitsu* religious establishment opposed this notion by claiming that this world was in reality the Pure Land, and conceptions regarding plants becoming buddhas reinforced the idea with a sacralized vision of the environment and the territory of everyday life. In doing so they affected *kenmitsu* Buddhist soteriology primarily in two ways: by generating new concepts of Buddha and Buddhahood as related to social groups (initiatory lineages in particular), and by proposing a new notion of the place of salvation.

Concerning the first effect, the impression is that *hongaku* teachings, both Tendai and Shingon, were an initiatory form of easy practices—the elite equivalent of simple practices for common

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[73] Hayami Tasuku 速水侑, *Nihon bukkyō no rekishi: kodai* 日本仏教の歴史ー古代, 1986; "Heian makki no jidai to shūkyō" 平安末期の時代と宗教, 1991.

people (*igyō* 易行). Scholars usually underscore the importance of meditation (*kanjin* 観心, *shikan* 止観) for the Tendai *hongaku* paradigm. However, Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士 notes how "instead of Tendai original meditative practices, the transmission of initiatory teachings of a purely formalistic character became more and more important."[74] Tendai visualization changed from meditation into a discursive, imaginific exercise; religious practice turned into the awareness of nondualism (*funi* 不二) and the understanding of particular doctrines loosely related to Tendai meditation. Such understanding was acquired not through a mystical experience but through oral transmissions of secret knowledge (*kuden* 口傳). The same developments—the discursive and ritual turn of ascetic practices—also took place within the Shingon elite tradition.[75] The transformation of *hongaku* doctrines thus ended in the paradoxical result that traditional religious practice was no longer necessary. Instead of meditation and devotion, initiation and awareness of secret meanings became paramount. Soteriology thus acquired a new dimension.

The concept of *sōmoku jōbutsu*, in its most radical formulations after the thirteenth century, did not establish the identity between trees and Buddhahood. It implied instead the awareness that trees and buddhas, in their own different ways, were absolute, eternal and abiding (*jōjū* 常住), and that therefore there was no need (or possibility) for the former to turn into the latter. The same was true for all beings and all forms of existence in the universe. The previously mentioned *Sanjūshika no kotogaki* gives us some evidence in this respect:

> 云世間相常住堅固不動非云常住。世間者、無常義也、差別義也。無常乍無常常住不失。差別乍差別常住不失也。
>
> In the expression "the character of the everyday world is eternal and abiding," the term "eternal and abiding" does not mean "solid, unchanging." "Everyday world" means "impermanence" and "differentiation." Now, impermanence, precisely as impermanence, is eternal and abiding, lacking nothing; differentiation, precisely as differentiation, is eternal and abiding, lacking nothing.[76]

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[74] Sueki, 1991, p. 46.

[75] On this subject, see Robert H. Sharf, "Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism," forthcoming.

[76] *Sanjūshika no kotogaki*, in Tada *et al*., eds., 1973, p. 157.

Or furthermore: "Our tradition defines individual phenomena (事 *ji*) as true reality (実相 *jissō*). Hell as such, the realm of hungry ghosts as such (...), the realm of buddhas as such, as they are, are the absolute nature of Dharma (*hōni* 法爾), the true reality."[77] If phenomena are absolute, then there is no place for rituals or ascetic practices, since all actions, even non-intentional ones, are parts and manifestations of Thusness. *Hongaku* thought abolished all distinctions between the absolute principle and its concrete occurrences. Phenomenal reality itself became the absolute.[78]

In this way, the concept of Buddha and the practices to become a buddha went through significant alterations. Here, Tendai and Shingon texts stress two important points. The first is that differences between buddhas and sentient beings are a matter of epistemology, not ontology: in other words, one is a buddha if he or she possesses the initiatory knowledge handed down from one buddha to another (I will examine the ideological implications of this idea later). The second point is that religious practices began to consist in the awareness of being identical with the absolute—defined as the Realm of the Lotus Karma (*renge inga sekai* 蓮華因果世界). The statement that "the Dharmadhātu in its totality is a lotus flower. We are a lotus flower. In our chest there is a lotus flower"[79] is probably based on visualization texts, but it is not clear whether such visualizations were actually performed. Rather, most likely it was enough to receive such esoteric teachings to acquire the awareness of one's Buddhahood, specialized religious practices being no longer necessary. This was reinforced by the fact that everyday activities were considered religious practices—even those contrary to Buddhist ethics. After all, "afflictions and enlightenment are identical" (*bonnō soku bodai* 煩悩即菩提), since "the Dharmadhātu is the substance of afflictions," as Tendai texts tirelessly repeat.[80]

Let us now turn our attention to the second effect of the *hongaku* reformulation of Buddhist soteriology: the revision of the place of

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77 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

78 Tamura, 1991, pp. 159-161. For a discussion of various meanings of the concept of "absolute" in Buddhist thought, see also *ibid.*, pp. 27-68.

79 *Ichijōshō*, cit. in *ibid.*, p. 176.

80 On this subject, see Tamura, 1991, pp. 159-184. Critics such as Shōshin (active 1160-1207) attacked these ideas arguing that a cognitive transformation is not enough, and that salvation needs to be a total transformation based on ascetic and devotional practices as well as on the respect of the precepts. See Sakamoto, 1980, pp. 413-418; Miyamoto, 1961, pp. 681-683; Tamura, 1991, pp. 393-398.

salvation on the basis of ideas of territory, materiality, and objects. *Sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrines were, in short, a step in a process aimed at sacralizing everything. In this regard, William LaFleur's claims again present several problems, as he argued that the cultural and political crisis of the twelfth century brought some Buddhists "to regard nature as the proper locus of salvation." In particular, LaFleur writes: "Chūjin's theory opened the possibility for this. More exactly, the *hongaku* view of enlightenment made this type of valorization possible."[81] The assertion is open to question. First, the importance of nature (that is, of a realm separate from the condition of secular everyday life) as the place of asceticism has always been present in Buddhism, and in Japan it had already acquired a particular relevance by the end of the Nara period with the so-called "Jinenchi lineage" (*jinenchishū* 自然智宗),[82] well before the formation of systematic *hongaku* thought. Accordingly, the development of cults centered on sacred mountains was not just the consequence of a crisis of elite cultural models, nor was it caused by the attribution to nature of the status of salvific locus *par excellence*. Second, sacred mountains, a highly culturalized space, were not the totality of nature—which, for the most part, had no soteriologic relevance in actual religious discourse and practice. Third, the poets cited by LaFleur did not celebrate nature's beauty in itself, nor its salvific power; on the contrary, the landscapes they describe belong to the sacred places of Japanese religious tradition (Yoshino 吉野, Kumano, etc.), and in any case poetic descriptions were often not the result of direct observation, but of re-elaboration of previous poetic images. Finally, the *Kankō ruijū*, believed by LaFleur to sanction such a new religious role for nature, was not written in the twelfth century but, as we have already seen, most likely in the second half of the thirteenth. Thus, it did not "open" the possibility of nature's soteriologic valorization but, at most, it systematized some aspects of it.

Nonetheless, it is true that some Nō plays present trees as

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[81] LaFleur, 1973, p. 112.

[82] This was a Japanese Buddhist lineage centered in the Hisoji 比蘇寺 temple in Yoshino. Founded around the beginning of the eighth century, probably by Chinese expatriates, it focused on mountain asceticism as a way to attain enlightenment, which the school defined as the "unconditioned wisdom" (*jinenchi*). During the Nara period this school became a center of esoteric (*mikkyō*) practice.

endowed with salfivic power.[83] In LaFleur's words, "the tree *as tree* performs for man a religious role and in its own ordinary mode of being is an adequate substitute for the rites and actions normally associated with religious cultus."[84] Thus, "the discussion that began with the question of the possibility of salvation *for* plants and trees eventually led to the position that there was a salvation for man which was derived *from* plants and trees."[85] However, this fact did not necessarily imply a particular interest in nature per se. *Kenmitsu* doctrines established a necessary relationship between place, tools, and methods of religious practice and salvation; in this way, salvation could be guaranteed.[86] As a consequence, the environment could acquire a soteriologic value, but simply as the location of religious practice. In this sense, the natural environment was no different from a temple hall, a meditation hut, a cemetery, or even the body of the practitioner. In addition, the learned monks (*gakuryo* 學侶) who wrote the texts on the salvation of plants were generally based in urban temples, and had no interest in valorizing the natural world, which was the realm of *hijiri* 聖 and *yamabushi* 山伏, their rivals for the control of the religious market.[87]

In other words, the Buddhist discourse on the salvation of plants did not aim to sanction nature's soteriologic power. Its main goal was a very different one, with a political and ideological character. As I will argue in the next chapter, the attribution of absolute value to the whole of reality, and especially to the nonsentient, transformed everything into a sacred dimension and served to create a Buddhist ideology of domination that justified the *kenmitsu* institutions' control over the territory.

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83 On the *sōmoku jōbutsu* concept in Nō plays, see Donald H. Shively, "Buddhahood for the Nonsentient: A Theme in Nō Plays," 1957, pp. 135-161.

84 LaFleur, 1973, p. 118.

85 William LaFleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature. Part Two," 1974, p. 227.

86 On this subject, see Rambelli, 1991.

87 On the relationships between center and marginality in premodern Buddhist institutions see for example Satō Hiroo, 1987, pp. 34-46, and Sasaki Kaoru 佐々木馨, *Chūsei kokka no shūkyō kōzō* 中世国家の宗教構造, 1988.

CHAPTER 3

IDEOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Environmentalism and Ecological Ethics

Sōmoku jōbutsu doctrines are often taken as representing some key aspects of the Japanese attitude toward nature and the environment. In Japan, Umehara Takeshi 梅原猛, Sakamoto Yukio 坂本幸男, and Tamura Yoshirō 田村芳朗, among others, support this position in different forms.[1] The standard interpretation is summarized by David Shaner in the following way:

> The Japanese religious and philosophical tradition represents a resource for environmental philosophy in its long-standing theoretical and practical commitment to an ecocentric, as opposed to homocentric or egocentric, world view. (...) In the Japanese tradition, ecocentricism and cultivation [*shugyō*] represent two threads that weave a seamless ethical fabric characterized by developing one's sensitivity to others and nature.[2]

Statements such as this are now part of the received understanding of Japanese culture and religion. However, they are highly problematic. First, if ideas on plant's Buddhahood are just extensions of more general cultural trends, they lose their originality as particular intellectual formations. Secondly, Japanese Buddhism, as we have seen, was not completely supportive of these ideas, which in fact provoked debates and criticism. Must we conclude that people such as Shōshin, Hōnen 法然 (1133-1212), or Dōgen, who were, for different reasons, against Tendai doctrines on the Buddhahood of plants, were not good Buddhists (or perhaps, not good Japanese)? Thirdly, in the development of *hongaku* thought,

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1 See in particular: Umehara Takeshi 梅原猛, *Nihonjin no "ano yo" kan* 日本人の「あの世」観, 1989; "Animizumu saikō" アニミズム再考, 1989; Sakamoto, 1980; Tamura, 1991. For a recent example of the traditional approach to this kind of "animism," heavily influenced by Umehara Takeshi, see, in the field of art history, Tsuji Nobuo 辻惟雄, *Yuge suru shinbutsutachi* 遊戯する神仏たち, 2000.

2 David E. Shaner, "The Japanese Experience of Nature," 1989, p. 163.

Tendai and Shingon doctrines on the status of nonsentients assumed different, if not contrary forms, indicating that there was not "one" Japanese attitude toward nature. Fourthly, we can hardly label as "ecocentric" (in contrast to "homocentric," as David Shaner calls it) a doctrine that considers plants, nonsentients, and the environment as sentient beings modeled on the human species, which was the doctrinal move Shingon and Tendai theorists often made. Fifthly, religious practice (and cultivation in general) acquired a different meaning with the development of *hongaku* doctrines as well as their vision of beings, their environment, and the universe (as discussed in Chapter One). Sixthly, "nature" is a highly complex and ambiguous term, that can partake of many meanings depending on the intellectual contexts in which it is employed.[3] Finally, it is possible to argue that *sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrines were not directly the expression of ecological concerns but rather were tools in the ideological edifice of medieval Japanese Buddhism. Thus, there is ample reason to reconsider their position within the intellectual history of Japanese culture, and, I will argue, with particular regard to their ideological effects.

Arguments such as the one summarized by Shaner imply a number of more or less explicit assumptions. They suggest that Japanese culture is uniquely different from all others; that it is characterized by the permanence of certain essential features such as a special, direct relationship with nature and reality in general; that such a direct relationship is a consequence of primordial attitudes to be found in the cults of the earliest inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago (the so-called "Jōmon people," *jōmonjin* 縄文人), treated as Ur-Japanese; that the essential elements of these cults are still surviving today in Shintō; and that Buddhism was influenced and modified by Shintō. Interestingly, the alleged "love for nature" of the Japanese seems to function only in Japan. Authors are either not concerned with environmental damage caused by Japanese companies abroad, or they explain such damage as an evil outcome of Western influence. In any case, the notion of a love for nature that is unique to the Japanese is often a conceptual reference point for attitudes of nationalism and cultural chauvinism.

The theoretical and practical problems posed by such widely accepted ideas are evident: culture is essentialized, and Japan is treated as a sublime exception. Particularly dubious are claims

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[3] Jury M. Lotman, quoted in Gillo Dorfles, *Artificio e natura*, 1977, pp. 40-41.

concerning the Japanese special connection with the core of reality.[4] The history of Japanese religion is also treated in a hypersimplified manner to support the entire ideological edifice of cultural nationalism. There is no need to point to the similarities of these ideas with those exposed in the field known as *nihonjinron* 日本人論.[5] It is worth noting, though, that *nihonjinron* ideas also influence the study of Buddhism, as in the case of doctrines concerning the salvation of plants and the nonsentients, in ways that prevent a real understanding of the cultural impact of such doctrines.

A typical example of the attempt to project an immemorial and supposedly unchangeable past onto the present, described as the key of homogeneity and self-identity, is a text by Joseph Kitagawa:

> As far as we can tell, one of the basic features of the early Japanese religious universe was its unitary meaning-structure, a structure which affirmed the belief that the natural world is the original world, and which revolved around the notion that the total cosmos is permeated by sacred, or *kami*, nature. Undoubtedly, the world to the early Japanese was only that world which they experienced in the Japanese archipelago and which the chroniclers referred to as the "Central Land of Reed-Plains." Everybody and everything in the early Japanese monistic religious universe, including physical elements such as fire, water, wood, and stone, as well as animals and celestial bodies, were believed to be endowed with *kami* nature.[6]

More explicitly, "to the early Japanese, the natural world (Japan), therefore, was essentially the religious universe, a world in which all facets of daily living were considered religious acts. Such a religious universe was nurtured by myths."[7] In this last sentence we find a problematic fusion of two very different concepts, namely "the natural world" and "Japan." The fusion of nature and the

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4 On this subject, see Fabio Rambelli, "The Empire and the Signs: Semiotics, Ideology, and Cultural Identity in Japanese History," 1999.

5 For a critique of *nihonjinron*, see Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, 1986; Roy Andrew Miller, *Japan's Modern Myth: The Language and Beyond*, 1982; see also Rambelli 1999. For a sympathetic summary of *nihonjinron* ideas, see Fosco Maraini, "Japan and the Future: Some Suggestions from Nihonjin-ron Literature," 1975.

6 Joseph M. Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion*, 1987, p. 70.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

state, territory and the people has spawned hundreds of volumes on the specificity of the Japanese and their attitudes toward nature. The assumption here is that already *in illo tempore* there existed a "Japan," that is, the Japanese state, and that there were the "Japanese" who experienced "nature" as inseparable from the political entity in which they lived. As meta-historical entities, Japan and the Japanese, understood in this way, are "eternal and unchanging" (*jōjū*), as it were. Such a position explains, in this kind of *nihonjinron* argument, the continuity of basic cultural patterns such as the attitude towards nature or a supposedly animistic perspective.

The very term used in Japanese to refer to "nature" has a complex history. The modern noun *shizen* 自然 is a neologism coined during the Meiji period to match the Latinate "nature."[8] In premodern Japanese there was no general term to refer to what we call today "nature" (or *shizen*). *Shizen* is the *on* 音 (sinitic) sound of a word normally read *jinen* in classical Japanese sources. It belonged to Buddhist and Daoist philosophical discourses, in which it referred—generally as an adverb—to something that is unconditioned and absolute. Most texts on the Japanese concept of nature explain "nature" (*shizen*) as *jinen* (something that "becomes spontaneously," glossed as the totality of the universe), even though they underline the fact that *shizen* and *jinen* are different, even grammatically (*shizen* as a noun, *jinen* usually as an adverb).[9]

A significant example among many of this attitude is an essay by Hubertus Tallenbach and Kimura Bin.[10] The authors write that the ancient Japanese language had no noun corresponding to the English *nature*; however, they do not hesitate to use the meaning of the adverb *jinen* to explain the meaning of the modern neologism *shizen*. In this way, they can explain a new, foreign concept (*shizen*)

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[8] See Yanabu Akira 柳父章, *Hon'yaku no shisō. Shizen to Nature* 翻訳の思想ー自然とNature, 1977.

[9] On the Japanese concept of nature see, among others, Arne Kalland and Pamela J. Asquith, 1997: pp. 1-35; Augustin Berque, *Le sauvage et l'artifice*, 1986, pp. 169-213; Yanabu, 1977; Kaneko Musashi 金子武蔵, ed., *Shizen. Rinrigakuteki kōsatsu* 自然ー倫理学的考察, 1979; Maruyama Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 1974; Sagara Tōru 相良亨 *et al.*, eds., *Shizen* 自然, 1983.

[10] Hubertus Tallenbach and Bin Kimura, "The Japanese Concept of 'Nature'," 1989.

in terms of an ancient Oriental autochthonous tradition (*jinen*), but the philological and philosophical legitimacy of such an endeavor is dubious. This is an example of the semiotics of reversed Orientalism, in which something that the "Westerners" saw in the "Orient" is appropriated by the "Orientals" by creating a new concept through old words. An analogous process is also at play perhaps in modern interpretations of Buddhist notions on plants becoming buddhas, in which a historically determined Buddhist doctrine is interpreted as signifying supposedly more general and ahistorical features of Japanese cultural identity (such as animism and love for nature). These features are implicitly presented as different, if not diametrically opposed, to what authors believe are the grounds of Western civilization.

I do not know when the stereotype of the Japanese love for nature exactly began. I assume it is the result of a conflation of Kokugaku 國學 Nativism and Western Orientalism that occurred toward the end of the Meiji period in an effort to create a sense of national and cultural identity for the modern Japanese nation state. Such appropriation of Orientalism in Nativistic terms was obviously very successful, and produced one of the most enduring (albeit largely imaginary) features of Japanese culture. An early source of this discourse is Haga Yaichi 芳賀矢一 with his "Kokuminsei jūron" 国民性十論 (Ten Theses on Japan's National Character).[11] In Thesis Four ("Love for Plants and Trees, Enjoyment of Nature" 草木を愛し自然を喜ぶ), Haga wrote that the Japanese are directly connected to nature, and that this attitude comes directly from nature itself, which in Japan is particularly benign.[12] Now, it is true that Japanese culture traditionally makes large use, practical and symbolic, of plants. Augustin Berque suggests that the symbolic emphasis on vegetation and its important aesthetic overtones may be explained paradoxically as a form of nostalgia for a lost nature, perhaps due to the cataclismic transformations following the construction of large cities based on a Chinese model. Aristocratic themes, initially for the most part related to poetry, gradually penetrated through the rest of society creating a solid system of cultural images of nature.[13] However, Berque stresses that the Japanese sentiment toward nature has never ceased to evolve, and

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11 Haga Yaichi 芳賀矢一, "Kokuminsei jūron" 国民性十論, 1977 (originally published in 1907).

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 174-188.

13 Berque, 1986, pp. 105-107.

eventually it came to be associated with national identity.

The connection between nature and the sacred, underlying current interpretations of *sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrines, can be found in a different kind of mythological substratum. Berque writes:

> In Japan as in Europe exists a myth of the primordial forest, site of ancestral inquietudes but also nostalgia of nature that disappears. Differently from Europe, however, and for obvious reasons, this forest has joined the mythological constellation of attributes of Japaneseness; it plays, in fact, in the imagination of today's Japanese, the role of originary matrix, grounding of national authenticity.
>
> This forest has a name: it is the coniferous forest (*shin'yōjurin*) that once covered the plains of most of the larger islands (...). The basic idea is that such forest environment, that of Jōmon prehistoric culture, was the cradle where Shintoism was born.[14]

Geographically, almost nothing remains today of this originary forest except only some 16,000 hectares (0.06% of Japanese forests). Symbolically, though, this tiny portion of forest is important because it is almost exclusively constituted by sacred trees (*chinju no mori* 鎮守の森) surrounding Shintō shrines around Japan.[15] It is easy, then, to create, through a sort of Eliadian move, a modern mythology surrounding these forests as loci of the sacred and, by extension, as the original loci of Japanese civilization. Fragments, remnants of the past, are thus used in a mystified way as symbols of unbroken Japanese natural and cultural continuity in order to downplay or deny the extent of actual changes that occurred in the Japanese archipelago over the centuries.

However, as semioticians Algirdas Greimas and Joseph Courtés explain, "nature can never be a sort of primary, originary given, preceding humankind, but it is rather a nature already culturalized, informed by culture."[16] The natural world, which "presents itself to human beings as a vast ensemble of sensorial qualities, as endowed of a determined organization," is in fact "a 'discursive' structure since it presents itself within the subject/object relationship as an 'utterance' constructed, and decypherable, by the human

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14 Berque, 1986, p. 114. On the coniferous forest, see Ueyama Shunpei 上山春平 *et al.*, *Shin'yōjurin bunka* 針葉樹林文化. Vol. 1, 1969; Vol. 2, 1976.

15 Cited in Berque, 1986, p. 114.

16 Algirdas J. Greimas and Joseph Courtés, *Semiotica. Dizionario ragionato della teoria del linguaggio*, 1986, p. 232.

subject."[17] Accordingly, the "natural world... should not be considered as a particular semiotics, but rather as the place where multiple semiotic systems are elaborated and rehearsed (...) a vast semiotics of cultures."[18]

Buddhist nature is no exception. As part and manifestation of universal substance—be it defined as Thusness (Jp. *shinnyo*, Sk. Tathātā) or Dharmadhātu—it is always textualized and thus culturalized. Natural elements even preach the Dharma, as emphasized in their respective ways by the Zen and Shingon traditions. Selected natural entities are directly related to religious awareness and practice, such as cherry blossoms, envisioned as symbols of Buddhist impermanence, and the moon, which recalls the esoteric meditation technique known as "moon-disk visualization" (*gachirinkan* 月輪觀).[19] Finally, the sacralization of nature, carried out in various forms by medieval *kenmitsu* exegetes, far from being the result of pre-existing, autochthonous models, was part of the hegemonic project of dominant Buddhist institutions, as the following discussion will elucidate.

Against Tree Cutting: Environmentalism, Religion, and Ideology

The dialogue between religion, economics, and power is particularly evident in medieval and early modern prohibitions against tree cutting on land belonging to religious institutions. These prohibitions are usually offered as examples of the environmental concerns of Japanese religious institutions. Yet, a critical approach to this issue will yield very different results as to the motivations behind temple and shrine politics.

As we have already seen,[20] both Tendai and Shingon exegetes made it clear that it is not a sin to cut a tree, even despite its essentially animated nature and its intrinsic Buddhahood. Dōhan, and later In'yū, for example, explained that nonsentients are made to be used by sentients, and inanimate objects in particular are originally destined to give support and nourishment to human

17 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

19 See Yamada Shōzen 山田昭全, "Bukkyō no shizenkan to nihonteki mujō" 仏教の自然観と日本的無常, 1986.

20 pp. 26-27, 35-36 ??? check

beings. How can we explain, then, the prohibition against cutting trees so common in medieval Japan? An answer can be found in the analysis of a number of test-cases. We will see that often the idea of the sacredness of trees was an *elite* formation diffused *by religious institutions* in the attempt to consolidate their presence at the local level and to limit the independent economic activities of villagers. Indeed, in contrast to doctrinal positions on the sacredness of trees, villagers did not apparently believe trees to be sacred.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, new agricultural areas began to be developed in heavily forested mountain regions, many of which were the sites of Buddhist temples. Trees were cut and new lands were cleared for agriculture. When it was technically and financially impossible to create new paddy fields for rice cultivation, other crops were introduced, such as chestnut and mulberry, soybeans, and wheat. The main agents of this development were soldiers (who later joined the ranks of the Kamakura *bafuku* 幕府 as *gokenin* 御家人), mid- and low ranking aristocrats, and even priests from large religious institutions in Nara and Kyoto. Such new economic activities resulted in strongly opposed positions between Buddhist temples, many of which were located in the mountains and surrounded by forests, and local residents with a direct stake in developing new agricultural lands.[21]

Documentary sources illustrate these competing interests. In 1104 (Chōji 長治 1) the Kōmyōsanji 光明山寺, an important temple in Yamashiro province, addressed a petition to the Great Minister of the Right Fujiwara no Tadazane 藤原忠実. The priests lamented that all the trees along the access path to the temple, planted to provide "cool shade in the summer" and to "protect from the wind in the cold winters," were regularly cut and burned each spring by nearby residents in order to gain new lands for agriculture. The fires were threatening the temple buildings and the monks' residences.[22] In 1117 (Eikyū 永久 5) the temple was finally declared a "votive site" (*gokiganjo* 御祈願所) of the regent (*kanpaku* 関白). Its land boundaries were clearly defined, and inside the sacred land it was forbidden to "cut trees and to hunt."[23]

21 In Seta Katsuya, ed., 1995, pp. 2-13 (esp. p. 6).

22 Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三, ed., *Heian ibun* 平安遺文. Komonjo-hen 古文書編 vol. 4, no. 1613, pp. 1474-1475.

23 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, no. 1866, p. 1671.

In 1168 (Nin'an 仁安 3), the Kinzanji 金山寺 in Bizen Province 備前國 (in present day Okayama Prefecture 岡山県) lamented that provincial officers and local residents were systematically cutting trees inside its territory, to the point that only a few trees surrounding the temple buildings remained. The monks requested that such practices be prohibited as a way to promote Buddhism and secure worldly and spiritual benefits. Trees—they claimed—were "ornaments of the buddhas and the deities" (*butsuda shōgon, shinmei genshoku no ryō* 仏陀荘嚴神明嚴餝之料).[24] In 1214 (Kenpō 建保 2), the territory of the temple was demarcated as inviolable, and the Kamakura government issued a prohition against hunting and cutting trees inside it.[25]

The Kinzanji was not the only temple to argue that trees were divine ornaments. At about the same time the Kongōji 金剛寺 in Kawachi Province was emphazing the same point, also adding that trees are to the mountains what intelligence is to human beings.[26] The Kōbōji 弘法寺 in Bizen Province, the Daisanji 大山寺 in Harima Province 播磨國, and the Tokugen'in 徳源院 in Ōmi Province were all using the same metaphor in different words. It is interesting to note that here the notion of "ornament" was more complex than we may think today. As suggested by the priests of the Kongōji in their metaphorical association of trees with intelligence, trees were an essential component of sacred space, the embodiments of its essence. It is possible to read here an echo of Shingon doctrines on inanimate objects being part of the mandala and therefore endowed with the wisdom of Mahāvairocana, doctrines that in any case could not have been used in full in an official document. We can detect, however, an interesting circulation between elite philosophical speculations and more practical concerns, between philosophical and bureaucratic discourses.

In 1273 (Bun'ei 文永 10), the Saimyōji 西明寺 in Ōmi province addressed a petition to the administrative offices (*mandokoro* 政所) of the regent's household lamenting that residents of the villages situated at the foot of the mountain had recently begun to cut sacred trees (*reiboku* 靈木). Monks had tried to stop them to no avail. Even worse, fires set by tree cutters had already burned

[24] *Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 2425, pp. 2712-2713.

[25] Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三, ed., *Kamakura ibun* 鎌倉遺文. Komonjo-hen 古文書編 vol. 4, no. 2128 pp. 144.

[26] Quoted in Seta, ed., 1995, p. 9.

several temple buildings. The temple priests warned that deforestation would reduce the natural fire-resisting capacity of the forest. As a consequence, the temple clearly demarcated its territory and enforced a ban against killing sentient beings and cutting sacred trees within its boundaries.[27]

Particularly well known is a conflict over the use of forest resources that arose in 1229, pitting the Katsuoji 勝尾寺 temple in Minoo 箕面 against the residents of nearby villages.[28] The lower ranking priests (*shuto* 衆徒) of the Katsuoji suddenly decided to prohibit the residents of nearby Sugano village and Toyoshima pasture from entering the mountain area around the temple for the purpose of cutting trees. As a preventive measure, the priests confiscated the villagers' sickles and hatchets. The villagers reacted by writing petitions objecting to the priests' decisions. They contested the new boundary line in very strong language, which, according to them, included lands that used to be of public use. The following year, however, the temple clearly demarcated its land possessions by placing sign posts on the boundaries. Interestingly, these sign posts were placed on mounds containing statues of the eight heavenly generals—apotropaic images that were obviously in charge of the protection of the temple's territorial integrity. In the meantime, the temple had addressed a petition to the Great Ministry of State (Daijōkan 太政官) asking for support. In the document, the temple stressed its long history of imperial support and explained that its territorial arrangements were being made to protect its sacred land (*kekkai* 結界) from the assaults of Māra, the king of demons in the Buddhist tradition. The temple denounced the residents living at the foot of the mountain and "bandits from the whole region" who had recently begun to trespass within the temple's boundaries in order to kill animals and cut trees. It concluded by asking for support, on the basis of the weakness of the priests and their inability to protect their territory.[29] Another contemporary document, the *Reimuki* 靈夢記, written by

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27 Takeuchi Rizō, ed., *Kamakura ibun.* Komonjo-hen vol. 15, no. 11, 222, pp. 76-78.

28 For a detailed analysis of the dispute see Minooshi shi henshū iinkai 箕面市史編集委員会, eds. *Minooshi shi* 箕面市史 vol. 1, 1964, esp. pp. 174-195; 436-437. The relevant primary documents can be found in Minooshi shi henshū iinkai, eds., *Minoo-shi shi* Shiryō-hen 箕面市史史料遍 vol. 1: Katsuoji monjo 勝尾寺文書, 1968, esp. pp. 54-63.

29 Minooshi shi henshū iinkai, eds., *Minoo-shi shi* vol. 1, p. 177.

the temple's priest Junkū 淳空, described acts of violence against the monks and scenes of desolation at the mountain, many areas of which had been deforested.[30]

From the extant documents, it appears that people in the area had been free to hunt animals and cut trees near the temple for a long time. The boundaries of the temple's land were probably not well defined, and people did not feel any particular religious remorse against cutting trees or killing animals. The priests became concerned when tree cutting began to occur very near the temple buildings. In part they may have been worried about the preservation of the beauty and the character of the place as a matter of symbolic capital: a temple in a deforested area would not have been a very appealing sight. In fact, signs of concern for the aesthetics of a sacred place also appear in other documents. The Sōtō Zen patriarch Keizan Jōkin (1268-1325), for example, issued a prohibition against cutting the branches of the pine trees near his monastery, almost certainly in order to preserve the beauty of the place.[31] But a more pressing reason for such prohibitions was definitely the danger that fires employed in deforestation activity could reach the temple's buildings and so threaten its survival—as the Saimyōji petition discussed above makes clear.

Another important issue at stake was the thin line separating on the one hand concerns for beauty and symbolic capital, and on the other the economic interests of the parties involved. As the editors of the history of Minoo city suggest, the cause of the dispute between the Katsuoji and the local residents was a dramatic transformation in the economic structure of the area, which had just changed from self-sufficiency to a form of market economy.[32] Trees were now cut not only for the immediate needs of the neighboring communities, but also to be put on sale as construction material or to be used to make charcoal. The priests were afraid that these new economic activities, in changing the life of the villagers, would also have a strong and negative impact on the environment. They had initially authorized the use of trees from their properties to make charcoal, but were shocked by the rapidity

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30 *Ibid.* See also Minooshi shi henshū iinkai, eds., *Minooshi shi shiryōhen*, pp. 55-59 for the complete text of Junkū's *Reimuki*.

31 Bernard Faure, *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, 1996, p. 190.

32 Minooshi shi henshū iinkai, eds., *Minoo-shi shi* vol. 1, pp. 183-184.

of deforestation.[33]

It is likely that similar situations also occurred in the other cases mentioned above. Initially, religious institutions tried to control economic development by turning a blind eye to it. They tolerated minor forms of trespass, and then even authorized guilds of tree cutters to fell trees in temple domains by granting them monopolies over logging and coal making. However, priests were shocked by the speed of progress of the new economy, which, because of its commercial and proto-capitalist nature, was radically different from previous forms of economic behavior. Traditional control of productive activities was becoming obsolete, threatening the social role of religious institutions. In some cases, the very existence of temples was endangered by fires started for land clearing and charcoal making. At that point, provincial temples lacking their own defense forces could only appeal to central authorities and invoke notions of sacredness as an ideological tool in the attempt to stop the exploitation of their lands. Trees were defined as ornaments of the buddhas and the *kami*, and temple lands were described as a Buddha's Pure Land. In short, notions of sacrality were employed by Buddhist institutions in order to combat economic transformations in their regions, transformations that were also affecting people's attitudes toward religious institutions themselves. As we have seen in the case of memorial services for old objects encouraged by the *Tsukumogami ki*, the impact on society of economic transformations was a matter of serious concern for Buddhist institutions. The enforcement of prohibitions against killing (hunting) and logging contributed to the diffusion of ideas and practices concerning sacred land. These subsequently took shape in ideas of Japan as the land of the *kami* (*shinkoku* 神國), and economy as a form of interaction with the invisible world of buddhas and *kami*.

The fact that institutional claims about the sacrality of trees were a kind of last resort against new practices and ways of thinking sheds an important light on received notions concerning the animistic outlook that supposedly constitutes the basis of Japanese Buddhist attitudes towards nature and inanimate objects in general.

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33 *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

Animism and the Japanese Cultural Tradition

Another common theme in modern studies of Buddhist doctrines on plants becoming buddhas is the assumption that these doctrines were the result of an animistic worldview that permeated Japanese culture. The fact is, almost all cultures present a fascination with the vegetal and natural world and with inanimate objects, a fascination that in some cases borders on "animism." In the modern Western tradition, for example, this attitude is expressed in many forms, from the grotesque vegetal portraits by Arcimboldo, to Charles Baudelaire's "Correspondances" ("Nature is a temple where living pillars/At times allow confused words to come forth..."), to recent Hollywood animated films such as "Roger Rabbit," and "Toy Story," in which cartoons and toys come alive and interact actively with humans and their environment. In relation to Medieval Japan we can also recall an instructive passage in the authobiography of the Sōtō Zen patriarch Keizan Jōkin:

> As for me, it was in the past, at the time of the Buddha Vipaśyin, that I realized the fruit of Arhatship. I was living on the Himalayas, to the north of Mount Sumeru. At that time I was the deity of a Kuvala tree. With the head of a dog, the body of a kite, and the belly and tail of a serpent, I was a four-footed animal. Although I was only a humble tree deity, I nonetheless received the fruit [of Arhatship].[34]

In this case, was Keizan referring explicitly to pre-Buddhist beliefs about the sacred nature of trees? Was he referring to the Buddhist *Jātaka* narrative tradition? Or was he referring to both?

Several documents actually tell us that the ancient Japanese did not consider *all* trees, and all of nature in general, as sacred. The *Hitachi fudoki*, for example, reports the following story:

> To the east [of the village of Satsu 薩都] is a large mountain called Kabire no Takamine 賀毘禮高峯. Here a heavenly god is enshrined, called Tachihayahio no mikoto 立速日男命 or Hayafuwake no mikoto 速經和気命. When he first descended to earth from heaven he landed on the top of an eight-branched pine tree in a place called Matsuzawa 松澤. This god's curse was terribly severe. If a man were to relieve himself in the direction of the god, he would immediately become sick or meet with some misfortune. The people in the area were greatly distressed and informed the court

[34] Quoted in Faure, 1996, p. 30.

> of their plight, asking for help. The court sent Kataoka no ōmuraji 片岡大連 to worship the god. He addressed the god saying: "Where you live now there are farmhouses nearby, and day and night the area is polluted. Do not remain here but move instead to a pure place high in the mountain and reside there." The god heard his prayer and ascended to the top of Mount Kabire; the villagers built a stone wall around his shrine.[35]

This story can be interpreted in many different ways, but it is clear that the villagers it refers to did not originally think that that particular tree was sacred, or even that a deity might be abiding in it. The presence of a *kami* was the cause of misfortune rather than something to celebrate as a sign of love for the sacredness of nature. Analogously, and as we have seen in the case of tree cutting on sacred lands, to the villagers most trees were not sacred at all—just logs to be used in construction works or as charcoal. Only the trees immediately surrounding the temple buildings were treated with some respect (and even then this was not always the case). Even in these cases, it is probably impossible to determine with certainty whether the trees were sacred because a temple was there or whether a temple was there because the trees were sacred. Available sources can provide support for either of the two possibilities. This implies that the issue of the sacredness of trees was far from commonly accepted. A story in the *Nihon ryōiki* on a speaking tree that was used to make a buddha image further confirms this point. The editor writes at the end of the narration: "Trees have no mind, how can they speak? (...) The voice must have been produced by a spiritual power."[36] This emphasizes an important distinction between trees whose natural properties had been changed by spiritual influences and trees in general, that were otherwise mere inanimate things.

The Tendai scholar-monk Shōshin 證眞 (active 1153-1207) wrote what is perhaps the most radical critique of Buddhist doctrines on plants becoming buddhas in his *Hokke sandaibu shiki* 法華三大部私記 (Personal Records on the Three Great Commentaries of the Lotus), written between 1165 and 1207. There he argued against the presence of a soul or consciousness in inanimate things such as plants from several perspectives. He noted that even Zhanran, according to whom nonsentients have Buddha nature, did not say that plants arouse the desire for enlightenment, perform religious

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35 *Hitachi fudoki* in Yoshino, ed., 1969, p. 29; see also Yamaguchi, 1999.

36 *Nihon ryōiki, kan* 2 no. 26, pp. 255-257.

practices, and become buddhas. For Shōshin, nonsentients cannot possibly become sentients. Plants may be produced by sentient beings as transformations of their minds, but they are not sentient in themselves. Even if one admits that plants have a mental principle, they would still lack the phenomenal, real mind that characterizes sentient beings and lies at the basis of the latter's potential to become buddhas. Moreover, even if one admits that plants are endowed with Buddha-nature, that alone does not imply that they can become buddhas. In fact, it is not easy to become buddhas even for sentient beings endowed with Buddha-seeds (*busshu*). Without external causes, plants cannot become buddhas even through the internal perfuming of Thusness; without autonomous effort they cannot be recipients of the grace of the buddhas.[37]

The potentially animated nature of objects was also a matter of contention, as we have seen in our discussion of the *Tsukumogami ki*. The people for whom this text was written evidently did not believe that objects had some sort of soul and therefore needed to be properly memorialized. As the text makes clear, old things *were* thrown away without any ceremony or regret. It is the author of the story who tries to present an "animistic" view of the issue by connecting troubles occurring in the human world with the desire for revenge held by things that had been unceremoniously disposed of. In all these cases, animism seems to have been a later elite ideology and not part of a more ancient popular tradition, and this must prompt us to consider the issues of animism, cultural continuity, and tradition further.

Komatsu Kazuhiko is aware that processes of commodification were taking place in Japan when the *Tsukumogami ki* was written, but he does interpret them as a transformation of the mode of production and a change toward consumerism. In his view, they were rather a simple increase in circulating goods, which were nonetheless consumed in a pre-capitalist manner; that is, for their use-value and not for their sign-value.[38] Accordingly, Komatsu sees in the *Tsukumogami ki* "a belief in the spirit of things and the regret caused by throwing things away."[39] Miyata Noboru agrees,

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37 Shōshin, *Hokke sandaibu shiki* no. 2, *Shikan shiki* 止觀私記, fasc. 1/1, in DNBZ vol. 21, pp. 798-802. See also Miyamoto, 1961, pp. 681-683, and Misaki, 1975, p. 92.

38 Komatsu, 1994, pp. 340-341.

39 Komatsu, "Suterareta furudōgu no obaketachi" 捨てられた古道具のお化けたち, 1997.

and adds a further "belief," according to which, if objects are disposed of without proper ritual action (memorialization *qua* pacification), the spirits of things could turn into ghosts and take revenge on human beings.[40]

A question comes immediately to mind: whose beliefs are these? The authors suggest that these were very common beliefs among the Japanese of the time, manifestations or residues of a more ancestral form of animism. However, the *Tsukumogami ki* is quite clear in emphasizing that objects had been thrown away without proper memorialization, thus indicating that not all medieval Japanese shared the beliefs Komatsu and Miyata uncritically attribute to them. While the text presents the animated nature of objects as both a philosophical doctrine and an explanation for events occurring in everyday experience (calamities and other inexplicable phenomena), the way in which it does so suggests that its audience needed to be convinced of the validity of such a doctrine. This clearly suggests that such an understanding was not part of folk sensibilities. The same seems also to apply to tree cutting, as discussed above. Villagers did not believe in the sacrality of trees (at least, not of *all* trees), to the point that they did not hesitate to deforest entire mountain areas and even to set fires in the immediate vicinities of neighboring temples. It was the Buddhist priests who emphasized in official documents addressed to the secular authorities the sacredness of the trees situated in their lands, as a way both to secure support and defend themselves. Therefore, the priestly author(s) of the *Tsukumogami ki* and of other medieval documents that seem to express a form of animism were in fact mobilizing a complex initiatory philosophical knowledge about the Buddhahood of nonsentients in order to induce their audience to "believe" superstitious ideas about everyday objects.

But why should this have been so important? It is arguable that the *Tsukumogami ki* and prohibitions against logging represent some of the answers of religious institutions to the development of forms of proto-capitalism during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods and to the consequent increase in commodification processes. Such developments threatened consolidated notions of order and the role of religion in society. In particular, while temple documents from the Heian and Kamakura periods insist on the sacrality of inanimate things as a way to help establish the temples' own independence and power, the *Tsukumogami ki* displays a

40 Miyata, 1996, p. 134.

more subtle strategy in its attempt to "re-enchant" everyday objects—which amounts to a de-commodification—by providing instructions on proper memorialization of objects. The *Tsukumogami ki* does not criticize commodification per se, nor does it provide guidelines about interaction with inanimate things. However, it does attempt to reduce the effects of commodification by introducing a ritual dimension in the *disposal* of used, exhausted objects. The de-commodification of objects was carried out through the development of new religious services (in themselves, another sort of commodity, albeit of a sacred nature), but avoided a critique of commodification and capitalist production. Such a critique could perhaps heve undermined the authority of the religious institutions themselves.

By introducing a new ritual dimension, Buddhist institutions were able to expand their presence in society at the level of micro-practices of consumption (and disposal) of objects. Buddhism attempted to control the new social tendencies by authorizing them and marking them off through ritual action. In this way, Buddhist institutions tried to counter (or limit) secular commodification by increasing the range of commodified sacred services they were offering. In other words, they attempted to use commodification for their own purposes.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the documents discussed in this chapter and the *Tsukumogami ki* are not manifestations of an ancestral animistic mentality. Rather, they were written in order to respond to certain contemporary problems of a social and ideological character.

A Metaphor of Power

Thus far we have seen that doctrines on plants becoming buddhas modified Buddhist soteriology in order to provide an ontological foundation for the existing social order. Moreover, far from being a direct product of Shintō animistic trends supposedly pervading Japanese attitudes toward nature—and ostensibly animated by environmental concerns—these doctrines played a role in the ideological arena of medieval Japan for the legitimation and strengthening of the *kenmitsu* system of domination. Ideological effects were actually felt on several levels. Doctrines concerning the salvation of plants were initiatory instructions for internal use

by Tendai and Shingon lineages on the one hand. On the other, they could be employed to control economic aspects of the land holdings of Buddhist institutions, especially those related to tree cutting and its revenues. In addition, they provided a doctrinal foundation for ideas concerning the sacrality of temples' territories, upon which the *kenmitsu* domination system was based.

The first level is fairly straightforward. As secret, initiatory teachings, *sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrines were used to establish the symbolic capital of Shingon and Tendai lineages. They presented hidden aspects of reality whose knowledge ensured the attainment of liberation and therefore the status of living buddha. In other words, these doctrines were a matter of social and intellectual distinctions that produced symbolic capital, which could in turn generate economic and political capital.[41]

On the second level, these ideas were paradoxically used to justify tree cutting. Taira Masayuki has shown that in temple *shōen* 荘園 estates Buddhist precepts against killing (*sesshō* 殺生) were used in order to control economic activities and produce revenues for the temple. Hunting and fishing, tilling the soil (in which insects were killed), felling trees to make firewood and so forth were described in medieval Japan as sinful activities that would cause rebirth in hell.[42] These sins could be atoned for by offering to the buddhas and *kami* (that is, to *kenmitsu* religious institutions) part of the production obtained from them. Temples authorized only certain guilds of tree cutters to fell trees within their property, generating an income that was sacralized as a form of offering or even sacrifice.

The third ideological level is more complex. Since the Insei 院政 period (eleventh to twelfth centuries), temples' landholdings had been subjected to processes of sacralization aimed at ensuring direct control of them and independence from state authorities (the Heian court and, later, also the Kamakura military government). More precisely, land possessions were conceptualized as an extra-territorial sacred space explicitly defined as a "Buddha-land" (*butsudo* 佛土 or *bukkokudo* 佛國土), the same term used to designate a Pure Land.[43] This process probably began when ancient beliefs in

41 On the concept of symbolic capital see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 1990; on the social and intellectual role of distinction for the acquisition and maintenance of symbolic capital, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1984.

42 Taira, 1991, pp. 247-249.

43 One of the first examples of land possessions defined as *buddha-land* occurs

the sacrality of mountains and forests were conflated with esoteric Buddhist notions of "sacred land" (*kekkai*).[44]

In due time, the process of sacralization of the land became increasingly complicated. It showed all the legal, philosophical, social, and politico-ideological features of hegemony formation on the model of Antonio Gramsci, as can be shown by outlining its steps individually

First, land sacralization was sanctioned by forged documents alleging a direct donation from that land's protecting deity, as in the case of Niu Myōjin 丹生明神 for Kokawadera 古河寺,[45] and Shōtoku Taishi for Shitennōji 四天王寺.[46] Religious institutions claimed that the real owner of their land was a supernatural figure, usually their main deity or buddha: Niu Myōjin and Kōbō Daishi for Mount Kōya 高野山, the Great Buddha 大佛 for the Tōdaiji 東大寺, Kumano Gongen 熊野權現 for Kumano. At the same time, a newly created legal principle stated that "land offerered to the buddhas cannot be regretted and returned" (佛陀施入之地不可悔返; during the medieval period, offered land could be claimed back from non-relatives even after several generations). This sanctioned the inviolability of religious possessions.[47]

In addition, everything within a temple's land possessions (*kekkai*) was sacred as belonging to a deity. Religious institutions reconfigured themselves as managers/mediators/banks between the secular and profane dimensions of reality, between the visible and the invisible realms. Yet, to further emphasize that a temple's land was a Buddhist paradise, everything in it was presented as sacred and inviolable, and secular customs and regulations did not apply

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in a document issued by the Daidenpōin 大伝法院 on Kōyasan in 1161 (Takeuchi Rizō, ed., *Heian ibun* Komonjo-hen vol. 7, no. 3153), in which Kōyasan is called "the first buddha-land of Japan."

44 One of the first *kekkai* in Japan was established by Kūkai on Kōyasan. See Kūkai, "Kōya konryū sho kekkai ji keibyakumon" 高野建立初結界時啓白文, and "Kōya konryū danjō kekkai keibyakumon" 高野建立壇場結界啓白文, collected in the *Seireishū* 性靈集, in Watanabe Shōkō 渡辺照宏 and Miyasaka Yūshō 宮坂宥勝, eds., 1965, pp. 408-412. See also David Gardiner, "The Consecration of the Monastic Compound on Mount Koya by Kūkai," 2000.

45 *Kokawadera engi* 粉河寺縁起, in Sakurai Tokutarō 桜井徳太郎 *et al.*, eds., *Jisha engi* 寺社縁起, 1975, pp. 54-55.

46 In *Shitennōji goshuin engi* 四天王寺御手印縁起, p. 63.

47 On this subject, see Kasamatsu Hiroshi 笠松宏至, *Nihon chūsei hōshi ron* 日本中世法史論, 1979; "Butsumotsu, sōmotsu, ninmotsu" 仏物・僧物・人物, 1980.

in it. In particular, prohibitions against killing animals and cutting trees were issued and enforced as strictly as possible,[48] but with significant exceptions represented by professional guilds licensed by religious institutions or the imperial household.

All of the preceding was based on and reinforced by an ontology and soteriology of inanimate things (land in particular), summarized by the principle that plants become buddhas. In this framework, violations of the politico-economic order sanctioned by religious institutions amounted to anti-religious actions, veritable crimes against the deities and the sacred cosmic order they represented. It is not surprising, then, that the refusal to pay taxes to the temples was branded as a sin that would provoke "punishment by the buddhas" (*butsubachi* 佛罰). This was a new, extra-canonical and heterodoxical concept that appeared towards the end of the Heian period in parallel with the development of the clerical economy centered on land possessions and revenues.[49] Social conflicts were thus mythologized and reduced to moments of a cosmic drama opposing Māra and the Buddha.

The particular ontological status attributed to plants and the nonsentients was used to support the established order. An example of this attitude is a vow made by Enshū Chōkai 圓宗朝海 in 1319, who, after collecting donations from thirteen thousand people, was able to commission and enshrine an image of Kannon. The relevant document clearly indicates that for Chōkai the world was hierarchically structured as a pyramid with deities and the emperor at the top, human beings in the middle, and animals, plants and nonsentients at the bottom. As Hosokawa Ryōichi 細川涼一 explains, even though the vow stresses that all beings are of the same substance as Kannon, their individual hierarchical positions are still emphasized by being mentioned in a sacred document. The reference to the nonsentients was a way to sacralize the imperial territory and the role of the sovereign.[50]

Such support for the established order and institutions was based on the idea that all of Japan was sacred, for everywhere in

48 On this subject, see Satō, 1986, pp. 41-43.

49 On *butsubachi*, see Fabio Rambelli, "Buddha's Wrath: Esoteric Buddhism and the Discourse of Divine Punishment," (forthcoming a).

50 Hosokawa Ryōichi 細川涼一, "Umehara Takeshi shi no nihonjin no 'ano yo' kan ron ni yosete" 梅原猛氏の日本人の「あの世」観論によせて, 1991, pp. 9-10. On Chōkai's vow (*ganmon* 願文), see Hosokawa Ryōichi, *Chūsei risshū jiin to minshū* 中世律宗寺院と民衆, 1987, p. 196.

Japan buddhas and bodhisattvas manifested themselves in one form or another. Tōgan Ean 東巌慧安, for example, wrote in 1269 in his vow to Hachiman 八幡:

> 草木土地山川澤、水陸虚空、無非垂迹之處。
>
> Plants and the land, mountains, rivers, and swamps, the earth and the sky—there is no place where the manifestation of traces [of buddhas and bodhisattvas] does not occur.[51]

This idea is obviously related to medieval discourses on the Buddhahood of plants. More specifically, the territory of Japan was envisioned not as a mere space in which salvific activity took place, but rather as an occurrence of the *sanmaya maṇḍala*. As the sum total of the material embodiments of the mental states of the Buddhist deities, it communicate their various meditative states (*samādhi*) to the people living in it.[52] In other words, the territory was the site of salvation, the vehicle of salvific messages, and the body of the achieved Buddha. The territory of the state was the polymorphous expression/embodiment/manifestation (its semiotic and ontological status is not very clear today) of particular spiritual states of a moral and religious nature. There was no distinction between the territory—the mandala as an object of worship (*honzon* 本尊) employed in Buddhist temples—and the universal mandala, the underlying structured substance of the cosmos, of which both are "separate physical forms" (*bunshin* 分身). As the *Hachiman gudōkun* 八幡愚童訓 (Instructions concerning Hachiman for Ignorant Children) explains: "the territory [of Japan] is (...) the unconditioned and undifferentiated (*jinen sōō* 自然相應) original land of Mahāvairocana (*Dainichi* [*no*] *honkoku* 大日本國).[53]

More generally, the discourse and practices of Japan's sacrality aimed to enhance the role of religious institutions as protectors of the country and producers of wealth (or, at least, as mediators in processes of wealth production): if Japan was a sacred country, characterized by the presence of deities, religious professionals were needed to interact with them—a need that was satisfied by

51 Takeuchi Rizō, ed., *Kamakura ibun*, Komonjo-hen, vol. 14, no. 10557 "Tōgan Ean ganmon" 東巌慧安願文, pp. 111-112. The vow was made to invoke the intervention of the deity to defeat the Mongols.

52 In'yū, *Kohitsu shūshūshō*, 4.362.

53 *Hachiman gudōkun* 八幡愚童訓 (*otsu* 乙 version), in Sakurai Tokutarō 桜井徳太郎 *et al.*, eds., *Jisha engi* 寺社縁起, 1975, p. 209.

kenmitsu institutions.

Finally, special groups of people, usually known as *jinin* 神人 and *yoriudo* 寄人, were established to be in charge of managing and policing the sacred lands of religious institutions.[54]

From all of this appears, in all its complexity, the role that doctrines on plants becoming buddhas played in medieval Japanese culture. This, obviously, cannot be reduced to mere environmental concerns resulting from animistic tendencies.

54 On *jinin* 神人 and *yoriudo* 寄人, see Amino Yoshihiko 網野善彦, *Nihon chūsei ni nani ga okita ka: Toshi to shūkyō to "shihonshugi"* 日本の中世に何が起きたか―都市と宗教と「資本主義」, 1997; *Nihon chūsei no hyakushō to shokunōmin* 日本中世の百姓と職能民, 1998.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of Tendai and Shingon doctrines regarding the possibility for plants to become buddhas in Chapter One revealed that, despite differing sectarian vocabularies and expressions, there was a common set of concerns underlying *kenmitsu* discussions on the status of nonsentients. Mature Tendai *hongaku* doctrines claim that plants *do not* become buddhas because they are already absolute and unconditioned parts of Thusness, and therefore they play an essential and unchangeable role in the economy of the cosmos. According to this view, salvation consists in acquiring an awareness of one's position within the cosmic (and social) order, and in being content with one's absolute status. Shingon claimed that plants and the nonsentients are unconditioned parts of the Dharmadhātu and the Dharmakāya, which correspond to the *sanmaya mandara* in the fourfold typology of *maṇḍala* (*shiju mandara*). As such, plants do become buddhas. For Shingon, however, becoming a buddha is not vastly different from the Tendai acquisition of awareness of one's place in the cosmic order. According to Shingon, plants *do* perform religious practices, but religious practices are actually described as secular, everyday practices: in the case of plants, their vital cycle itself is a soteriologic process. In addition, both Tendai and Shingon traditions eliminated the sentient-nonsentient dichotomy by showing that all beings are actually endowed with mind and consciousness. Their difference is thus not ontological, but epistemological. It depends on our capacity to understand the animated nature of (apparently) nonsentient beings, and on the actual configuration of nonsentients' minds. As we have seen, mind and consciousness tend to be on the obverse or background side, rather than on the surface of inanimate beings.

These common doctrinal orientations correspond to common ideological concerns: the establishment of the legitimacy of leading Tendai and Shingon lineages, the consolidation of their members' social status, and, more generally, the strengthening of the social role of *kenmitsu* religious institutions.

The *kenmitsu* system was based on the idea, expressed in

different forms by the various traditions, that this world is the Pure Land (*shido soku jōdo* 此土即浄土). This gave a doctrinal ground to the contemporary social and political order by a *de facto* sacralization of it. Doctrines on plants becoming buddhas played a role in defining the status of the territory in which beings lived and acted, from the entire Dharmadhātu to the land of the Japanese state, and down to the land of each individual temple. It is well known that the notion of Buddhist paradise (*bukkokudo* or Buddha-land) was employed to define land possessions belonging to religious institutions.[1] It should not be surprising then that this idea of the sacredness of the territory and the pervasiveness of the Pure Land was not inspired by egalitarian concerns. Rather, it presupposed a closed hierarchy of beings and states of existence (in particular, the six destinations—*rokudō*—and the ten worlds—*jikkai*, but also the nonsentients), each deemed absolute and unconditioned. Differences—which were also social differences—were thus absolute and unbridgeable. According to this vision there was no real change, no transfer from one state to another. Change was described as the result of illusion and the incapacity to grasp the real nature of things. The law of karma was thus voided. Importantly, such radical affirmation of the existing order necessarily implied the absolutization of contemporary power relations and social and economic structures. In particular, at the top were the "perfectly enlightened ascetics" (*endon gyōja*), that is, the members of leading lineages, who considered themselves living buddhas. Even the emperor, conceptualized as a *cakravartin* (universal ruler protecting Buddhism), was ultimately dependent on Buddhist interpretations and rituals.[2]

While the adepts of the initiatory traditions claimed to be seeing the Pure Land in this world, commoners could only see the signs of hell: natural calamities, wars, disease, hunger, and suffering. But, as Satō Hiroo explains, interpreting the initiated's position, "if someone cannot see in it anything but the landscape of hell because they cannot acquire the capacity to discern true reality, the responsibility is theirs and only theirs."[3] According to Satō, this position reduced objective social problems to individual

1 Satō, 1986, pp. 54-64.

2 On this issue, see Fabio Rambelli, "The Emperor's New Robes: Processes of Resignification in Shingon Imperial Rituals" (forthcoming c).

3 Satō, 1986, pp. 57-58.

cognitive and spiritual ones by hiding the contradictions of the system under the veil of mysticism.[4] It is not surprising that Hakamaya Noriaki 袴谷憲昭 has accused *hongaku* thought of authoritarianism, and identified it as one of the theoretical instruments of social discrimination in Japan.[5]

Thus, this world, and nature in particular, was not a paradise for everyone, but only for those who were allowed to receive Tendai and Shingon initiation. *Sōmoku jōbutsu* doctrines were part of the discourse of a closed and powerful social group (elite *kenmitsu* monks) addressing social changes occurring in medieval Japan. Their argument was that change was ontologically impossible. This is reflected in Tendai and Shingon discussions on the status of plants and the nonsentients: since they were "always-already" part of absolute reality, there was no need (or possibility) for them to change into something other than what they were, such as a full-fledged buddha.

Beginning in the Muromachi period, initiatory notions about the salvation of plants began to spread throughout society, especially through media such as performing arts (especially Nō theater) and poetry (in particular, popular forms such as *renga* 連歌). The diffusion of *sōmoku jōbutsu* ideas may have had an ideological goal, namely that of further strengthening the position of religious institutions at a time when their power was beginning to be threatened by new social forces. Particularly important in this respect was the connection between those doctrines and two other areas of medieval religious discourse: *honji suijaku* doctrines and ideas about the sacredness of Japan (*shinkoku shisō* 神國思想).[6]

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4 Ibid., p. 58.

5 Hakamaya Noriaki 袴谷憲昭, *Hongaku shisō hihan* 本覚思想批判, 1989, p. 9; pp. 134-158. Sueki Fumihiko recognizes the need to investigate the relationship between *hongaku* thought and social discriminations, in particular against *buraku* people. Sueki notes, however, that some Buddhist movements influenced by *hongaku* thought reacted against such discriminations (Sueki, 1991, p. 46). For a critical treatment of the "Critical Buddhism" movement, see Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, 1997. In fact, *hongaku* ideas were also diffused among anti-establishment groups, which valued them for their antinomianism and anti-authoritarian potential. On this subject, see Fabio Rambelli, "'Just Behave as You Like:' Radical Amida Cults and Popular Religiosity in Premodern Japan," (forthcoming b).

6 On this subject see Fabio Rambelli, "Religion, Ideology of Domination, and Nationalism," 1996.

In conclusion, the idea of plants' salvation did not stem from environmental attitudes, but was primarily part of a larger ideological discourse aimed at legitimizing the place of Buddhist institutions in medieval Japanese society. Even though aesthetic and ecological concerns were not completely absent, they were essentially part of an ideological project aimed at accumulating for temples and their leading lineages what Pierre Bourdieu has called "symbolic capital." Symbolic capital was in fact a necessary requisite for the acquisition of socio-political influence and economic capital, both of which were needed by religious institutions in order to survive in the rapidly changing world of premodern Japan.

We have also seen that modern interpretations tend to emphasize alleged pre-existing Shintō and animistic elements. These interpretations miss the originality and main points of Buddhist speculations on the status of the nonsentients as doctrinal weapons for ideological purposes. When social and intellectual changes are downplayed or ignored in favor of mystified and nostalgic visions of a primordial past, as is the case here, we have merely the substitution of one ideological formation for another. In other words, whereas medieval Tendai and Shingon authors developed their doctrines on plants as ways to support their institutions' legitimacy and power, modern authors use the same doctrines as ways to reinforce a certain vision of Japanese national and cultural identity, as a way to legitimize Buddhism vis-à-vis the modern Japanese state.

The study of doctrines of plants becoming buddhas reveals not just Buddhist conceptions about nature, but also and especially the modalities of knowledge, power relations, and ideological apparatuses in the society in which these doctrines developed.

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Abbreviations

DNBZ	*Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本佛教全書. See Bibliography B.
NKBT	*Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文學大系. See Bibliography B.
NST	*Nihon shisō taikei* 日本思想大系. See Bibliography B.
SZ	*Shingonshū zensho* 眞言宗全書. See Bibliography B.
T	*Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Bibliography B.
ZSZ	*Zoku Shingonshū zensho* 続眞言宗全書. See Bibliography B.

A. WORKS AND COLLECTIONS BEFORE 1868

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[Records of the Secret Repository]), 9 *kan*, by Ryūyu 隆瑜 (1773-1850), written in 1842. SZ vol. 9.

Hokke sandaibu shiki 法華三大部私記 (Personal Records on the Three Great Commentaries of the Lotus [ie., the Tendai tradition]), 30 *kan*, by Shōshin 證眞 (active 1160-1207), written between 1165 and 1207. DNBZ vols. 21-22.

Ichijōshō 一帖抄 (One-booklet Commentary), also known as *Eshin ryū naishō sōjō hōmon shū* 慧心流内證相承法門集 (Collection of Doctrinal Instructions Concerning Enlightenment as Envisioned by the Eshin Branch [of the Tendai school]), written in the early fourteenth century. In *Tendaishū zensho* 天台宗全書 vol. 9, pp. 27-48. [See Bibliography B].

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Sanbōe 三寶繪 (Illustrated Tales of the Three Jewels), 3 *kan*, by Minamoto no Tamenori 源為憲 (d. 1011), written in 984. Critical edition in Mabuchi Kazuo 馬淵和夫 and Koizumi Hiroshi 小泉弘, eds., 1997, pp. 1-226 (See Bibliography B). English translation in Kamens, 1988.

Sanjūshika no kotogaki 三十四箇事書 (Notes on Thirty-four Items), also known as *Makura no sōshi* 枕雙紙 (Pillow Book), 1 *kan*, attributed to Genshin 源信 (942-1017), but probably composed in the first half of the thirteen century. Critical edition in Tada *et. al.*, eds., 1973, pp. 151-185 (See Bibliography B).

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Shitennōji goshuin engi 四天王寺御手印縁起 (History of the [Land Possessions of the] Shitennōji Temple [Certified by] the Noble Hand Seal [of Shōtoku Taishi]), 1 *kan*, supposedly found in 1007 by Shitennōji priest Jiren 慈蓮. DNBZ vol. 118, pp. 58-64.

Shōbōgenzō 正法眼蔵 (The Eye-Repository of the True Dharma), 75 *kan* (also circulating in other versions), by Dōgen 道元 (1200-1253), written between 1231 and 1253. In Terada Tōru 寺田透 and Mizuno Yaoko 水野弥穂子, eds., 1970-1972 (See Bibliography B).

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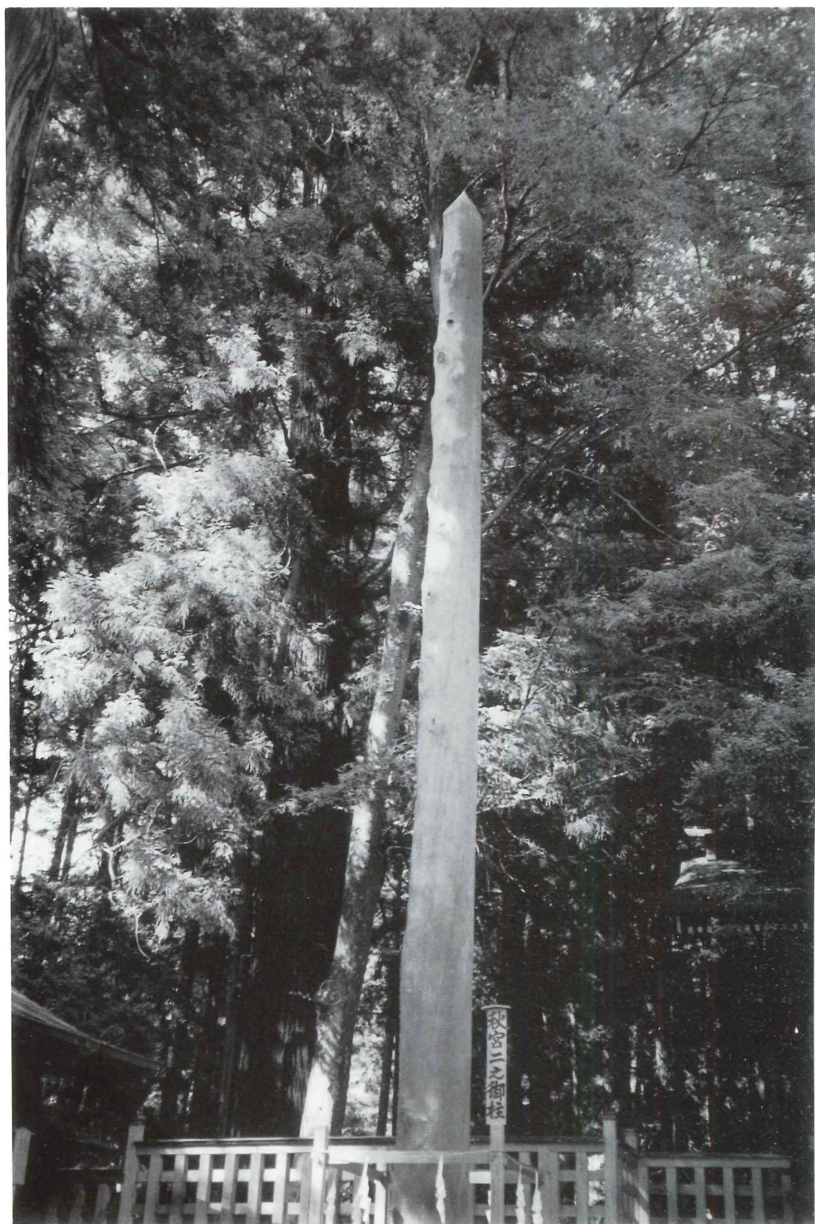


Fig. 2 - One of the sacred pillars at Suwa Taisha 諏訪大社, Nagano Prefecture. Photo by Fabio Rambelli.

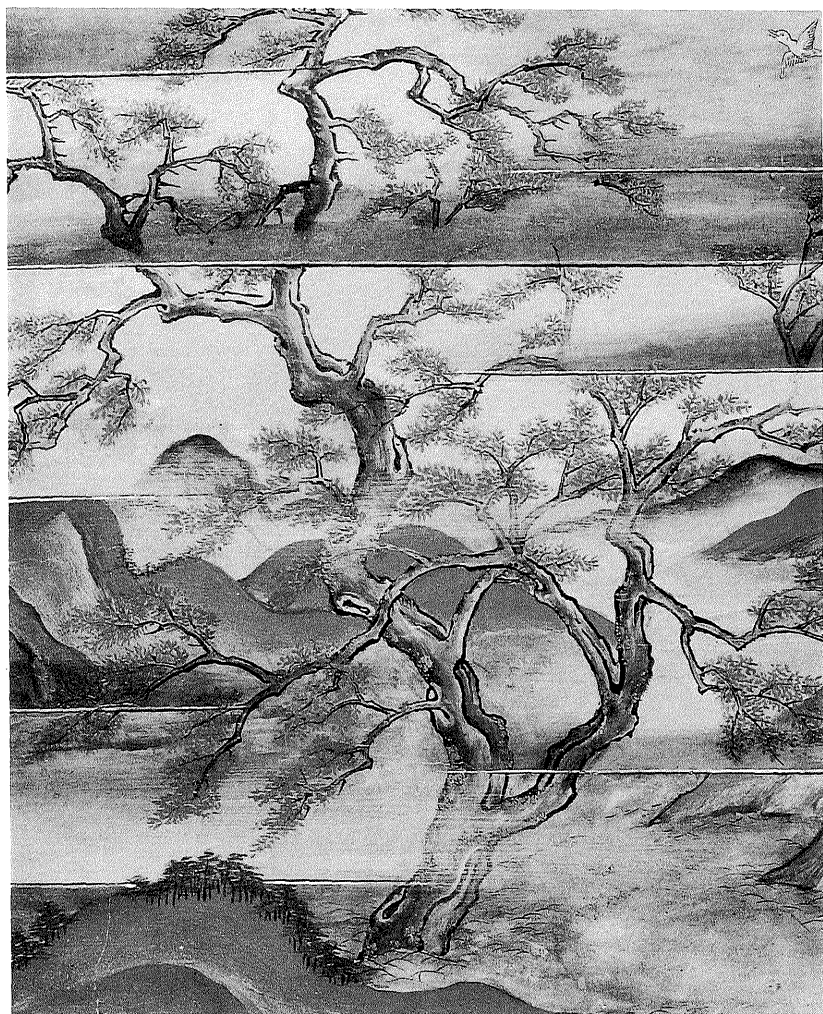


Fig. 3 - Image of a Giant tree from the *Sōjitsuji engi e* 桑実寺縁起絵 by Tosa Mitsumochi 土佐光茂. Sixteenth century, Sōjitsuji 桑実寺, Shiga Prefecture.

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